

Notes

Observation of a banded Rough-legged Hawk in western Placer County

— During the late morning of 2 February 2009, I was watching gulls, ducks, and waders at the Lincoln Wastewater Treatment Plant in western Placer County when Bruce Webb (BW) arrived and mentioned he had just seen and photographed a Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) only about a mile away on East Catlett Road. Since I wanted to add this bird to my Placer County list and possibly photograph it, I headed over to the area. About a quarter mile west of Fiddymont Road on East Catlett Road at 1230 h, I found a very accommodating Rough-legged Hawk nicely perched on a fence post



Figure 1. Banded Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*) along East Catlett Road, Placer Co., on 2 February 2009.

photo by Phil Robertson

on the north side of the road—perfect lighting under a light overcast sky for a photo. Unfortunately, the hawk quickly flew to the south side where the lighting was poor. I took a few photos and then the bird flew 50 yards west to alight on a post on the south side of East Catlett. After a few more photos I backed off, not wanting to further disturb the bird.

Even after looking through the photos and sending one to our Placer Big Year birding group, I didn't notice the leg bands. Luckily, BW noticed the two bands when he looked through his photos. Two days later BW and I drove to the same location after finishing our Lincoln raptor survey route. We found the same bird about one quarter mile west of the original location and took more photos. The photos (e.g., see Figure 1) showed the bird's left leg had a damaged dark band with the number "3" imprinted above the letter "W". Both the number and the letter were white and read right side up. The bird's right leg had an aluminum band which was upside down. The numbers, letters, and dashes on the band were on three levels. Not all numbers and letters could be read. The top line included the figures "-327-84" (the "4" could have been an "A"). The second line included the figures "D 2070," while line three showed figures "86" on one photo and "07-S" on another photo taken at a different angle.

I shared this information with Zach Smith, who made some inquiries about it. He discovered that the aluminum U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service band and the alpha-numeric color band were applied by Neal Johannsen, a raptor bander who subsequently identified the bird as one he had banded in 2002 less than 0.25 miles from where some of our photos were taken! According to Smith (see his blog for February 2009 at: www.centvalleyraptor.blogspot.com), "... this incredible site fidelity has been recorded in a number of raptors and this is just more proof that this behavior is fairly common and not the exception to the rule." He added that other individually-identifiable raptors along routes in the Central Valley have shown similar strong site fidelity from year to year. Ed Pandolfino (pers. comm.) analyzed banding data on Rough-legged Hawks in North America and found that birds banded in winter were encountered within less than 10 km of their banding site in 18% of cases (9/51) and within 100 km in 34% of cases (19/51), in spite of intervals ranging from 1-15 years between banding and encounter. Among Rough-legged Hawks banded in west coast states, site fidelity may be even stronger, with 86% (6/7) of birds found within 60 km of their banding site in subsequent winters over intervals between banding and encounter of 1-6 years. — *Phil Robertson, 2420 Blue Heron Loop, Lincoln, CA 95648.*