

AN UNUSUAL STORY — RECORD 20-YEAR LONGEVITY OF FERRUGINOUS HAWK

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Birds I have banded of five species (Black-crowned Night Heron, White-winged Scoter, Great Horned Owl, Black-billed Magpie, Bohemian Wax-wing) have held, for varying lengths of time, the North American records for longevity. For this reason, recent compilations of longevity records from the United States Bird Banding Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, begun in 1982, have been scanned with great interest.

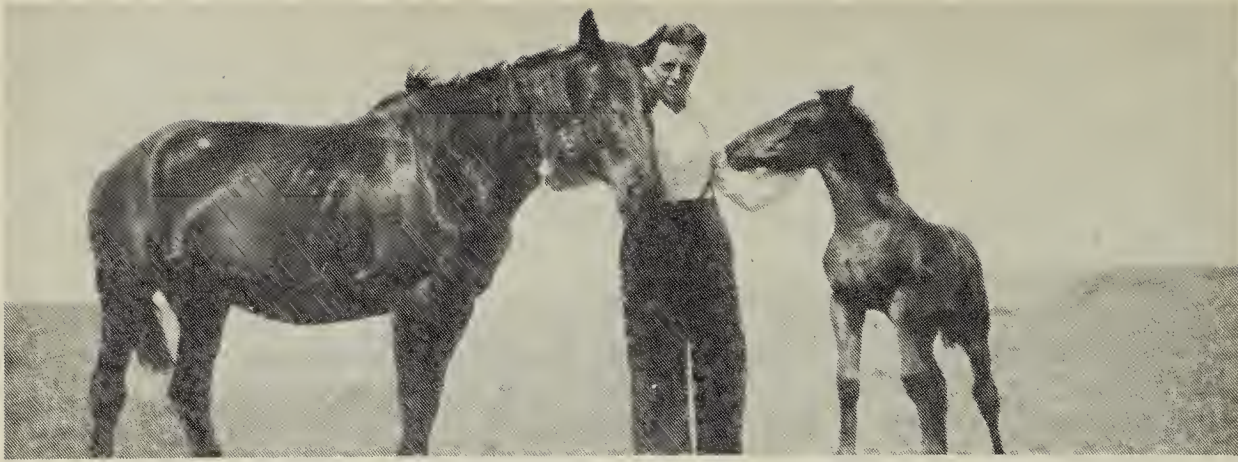
From official banding records, the oldest Ferruginous Hawk is one banded by W. Ray Salt in Rosebud, Alberta on 23 June 1935 and shot at Carbon, Alberta on 5 May 1951.² This item jogged my memory, and I looked up a brief note by Hoyes Lloyd in the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*, titled "Twenty year old Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk," the gist of which was as follows:

"A leather collar to which was fastened a bell and a name plate bearing a return address and the date was attached to the neck of a Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk at Clayton, New Mexico, on January 7, 1917. Approximately 20 years later, presumably during the spring of 1937, this hawk was found dead at Strongfield, Saskatchewan. The bird is reported to have wintered at Clayton during the years of 1918 and 1919, and to have nested in the same tree at Strongfield for the last 4 or 5 years prior to its death. The collar, bell and tag were returned to the person who placed them on the hawk and he positively identified them, and supplied the information upon which this item is based."³

This is probably the individual cited as 19 years of age in *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World*, p. 134, but the record is somewhat unsatisfactory since exact dates of finding of the bird, the name of the "bander" and the name of the finder were not given anywhere.¹ I wondered whether such information might yet be available.

My hope was that the finding of a bird of this age, with a bell, might be sufficiently unusual that someone in the Strongfield area would still remember it 46 years later. I telephoned the Follick family, on whose farm I had once banded young Great Horned Owls. Ken Follick made enquiries and phoned back the next day to report that neighbors had identified the finder as Orville Amrud, now living in Davidson. I contacted Orvald, who filled me in on many details. While checking cattle on a large patch of pasture, 5 miles east and 1 1/4 miles south of Strongfield one summer in the 1930s, he noted a very large hawk dead on the ground. When he kicked it he noted a bell around its neck. The hawk was familiar to Amrud, for the bell had been visible while it fed young at its nest for the preceding 5 summers. On closer inspection, he found a name plate attached with a key ring, the whole fastened with a leather strap. Amrud then loaned me a yellowing clipping from an unnamed and undated New Mexico newspaper, titled "20 Years Ago." The pertinent portions read as follows:

"W.V. Shouse, wholesale and retail oil dealer of Booker has a number of hobbies, principal among



Orvald Amrud about 1937.

these is studying the migration of wild fowls and collecting Indian relics. Mr. Shouse's interest in wild fowls has recently brought inquiries from the United States government, also Canada, as a bird he marked twenty years ago was recently found in that section.

"Back in 1917 Mr. Shouse and his family lived on a homestead ten miles from Clayton, N.M. While there Mr. Shouse had some trouble with coyotes and he set traps. On Jan. 7, 1917, he caught a large, fullgrown prairie hawk in one of these traps. The hawk, uninjured, was turned loose, but not until Mr. Shouse had put a leather collar around its neck to which a small metal bell, measuring approximately 1 1/4 by 1 1/2 inches was attached. On a key ring name plate attached to the collar he stamped the following:

"Write to W.V. Shouse, Jan. 7, 1917. Clayton, N.M.

"For two years, Mr. Shouse continued to live on the New Mexico land, moving away in 1919 when it was proven up. During that time each winter he would see the belled hawk. It always returned. After he moved, the hawk was almost forgotten until recently he learned it had been found dead in Canada and the bell collar and tag mailed to him — more than twenty years after he had placed it on the bird.

"The hawk, which is described as having been a large bird with a spread of four feet was found by an eighteen-year-old Norwegian boy, Orvald Amrud, living near Strongfield, Saskatchewan, Canada. The bird and its mate had been nesting in the same tree each summer for the past five years, the boy wrote Mr. Shouse. As no wounds were discernable it was supposed that it died of old age. Amrud wrote to Mr. Shouse at the Clayton address as given on the tag and when the letter was returned to him, made inquiry of the Clayton postmaster, who located Mr. Shouse.

"Inquiries have come to Mr. Shouse regarding date and locality of marking the bird and where recovered, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey. A record will be made on the bird and placed in the miscellaneous files of the department. The National Parks Bureau, Department of Mines and Resources, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada is also interested in obtaining a record on the hawk."

Documentation as to at least the year of the finding was still necessary. From my atlas I learned that Clayton had over a thousand inhabitants, large enough to have a newspaper, though I did not know its name. Then I phoned the area code for New Mexico, 505 followed by the free number 555-1212. I

was connected with an unusually helpful information operator. After reading down the list of enterprises in Clayton, none of which were "Times," "Herald," "Eagle" or anything that might be a newspaper's name, she thoughtfully added that Clayton was in Union County, and triumphantly gave me the name and phone number of the *Union County Leader*.

Too frugal to telephone, I wrote to the newspaper and eventually got a reply from D. Ray Blakeley, their helpful reporter. Ray replied: "Wouldn't you know . . . the 1937 bound volume of this newspaper was lost some years ago, having been borrowed and then left in a taxi cab in Amarillo, Texas." However, the *Leader* also owned the files of their one-time rival, the *Clayton News*. In the 14 April 1937 edition of that newspaper Ray found the following brief item:

"How long does a hawk live and how far does it travel in a life span. Postmaster A.L. England is asking that question this week following a letter from Canada regarding a hawk killed there last year. The writer claims he killed a hawk that carried a bell with the name W.V. Shouse, Clayton, N.M. and the date Jan. 7, 1917 scratched on it. He had written Shouse several times in Clayton and the letters had been returned unclaimed. He then wrote Mr. England who was able to find the present address of Mr. Shouse in Texas and forward the letter to him. A thousand miles of travel and 19 years of life; quite a record."

The identification of the hawk was correctly made by Hoyes Lloyd in 1937. Amrud was impressed by the large size of the hawk and the large size of the nest, in comparison with other "gopher hawks" in his locality. Although the body of the Ferruginous Hawk is a great deal larger than the Swainson's Hawk, each have a length of outstretched wings of more than 4 feet, Swainson's 48 to 56 inches and

Ferruginous 54 to 56.5 inches.⁴ Red-tailed Hawks would then have been much the rarest of the 3 *buteo* species, not expected to nest near Strongfield, and the fact of wintering in New Mexico makes Ferruginous Hawk the overwhelming choice. Although neither the "bander" nor the finder were experts in raptor identification, all evidence points to the Ferruginous Hawk. This individual clearly holds the "world's record" for Ferruginous longevity. It must have been at least 6 months old when the bell was attached in January 1917. When it died, presumably of natural causes (old age) in the summer of 1936, it was at least 20 years old.

It is unlikely that further information will come to light, but since Shouse by 1937 lived in Booker, in the adjacent "Panhandle" of Texas, I have also written to the *Perryton Herald* in Perryton, Texas, to see whether they might have published a slightly different version of the same story.

It seems unfortunate that Hoyes Lloyd did not provide more documentation when he published his little note, but had he done so he would have denied me a sleuthing experience that put me in contact with nice and unusually helpful people. It's been fun.

¹BROWN, L. and D. AMADON. 1968. *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World*. New York: McGraw-Hill. 2 vols.

²CLAPP, R.B., M.K. KLIMKIEWICZ and J.M. KENNARD. 1982. Longevity Records of North American Birds: Gaviidae Through Alcidae. *J Field Ornithol* 53:81-124.

³LLOYD, H. 1937. Twenty Year Old Ferruginous Rough-legged Hawk. *Canadian Field-Naturalist* 51:137.

⁴ROBERTS, T.S. 1955. *A Manual for the Identification of the Birds of Minnesota and Neighboring States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.