

DESCRIPTION OF A MELANISTIC SPECIMEN OF BUTEO LATISSIMUS (Wils).

By ROBERT RIDGWAY.

The melanistic plumage of *Buteo latissimus* having remained hitherto unknown, so far as the writer is aware, the following description is presented of a specimen recently acquired by the National Museum from Mr. J. W. Preston, of Baxter, Iowa. It is the only example which the writer has seen, or indeed heard of, except the two others seen by Mr. Preston, as recorded farther on.

*Melanistic ♀ adult* (No. 107,427, U. S. Nat. Mus., Crystal Lake, Hancock County, Iowa, May 3, 1883; J. W. Preston): Plumage of head, neck, and body, entirely continuous dark sooty brown, without the faintest indication of markings, even on the lower tail-coverts or lining of the wing; back darker, with a chalky cast in certain lights. Wings similar to the general plumage, but somewhat lighter brown, on account of paler, but not well defined, borders to the feathers; secondaries lighter brown than the coverts, without trace of markings except near the end, where crossed by a broad dusky subterminal band and very narrow paler terminal margin; primaries uniform dusky brown on outer webs, growing gradually blackish terminally; inner webs of the three outer quills chiefly white anterior to their emargination (the portion near the shaft brownish), the white crossed by several very distinct but irregular bands of blackish; inner webs of remaining primaries, and also of secondaries, brown, with a greater or less number (according to the length of the feather) of dusky bands, the webs mottled with whitish along the edge. Upper tail-coverts with concealed pale grayish broad bars (approaching white in places), there being about two bars on each feather. Tail black, narrowly tipped with grayish brown, crossed at about 1.50 inches from the end by a broad band (about 1 inch wide) of brownish gray, becoming white on edges of inner webs, and approaching white on the anterior portion of the band on the middle rectrices; another much narrower and much less distinct dull grayish band crosses the tail about 4.75 inches from the tip, the portion on inner webs more or less whitish on some of the feathers, but on none extending clearly to the edge of the web; extreme base of the tail light sooty grayish. Feathers of the head, neck, and body, above and below, sooty gray beneath the surface, the extreme base even scarcely approaching white; the feathers of the entire occiput, however, abruptly snow-white for about the basal half. Forehead entirely sooty blackish, but anterior portion of the lores grayish white, finely streaked with black.

Wing, 11.50; wing formula, 3, 4-5-2-6-7-8-9, 1, 10; outer three primaries abruptly and deeply emarginated on inner webs; tail, 7.00; culmen, .80; tarsus, 2.40; middle toe, 1.40.

This specimen presents an exceedingly close general resemblance to the browner examples of *Buteo fuliginosus* Sel., which is said to be the melanistic phase of *B. brachyurus* Vieill. An adult female of *B. fuliginosus* differs, however, as follows:—

*Dimensions.*

	Wing.	Tail.	Culmen.	Depth of bill at base.	Tarsus.	Mid. toe.
<i>B. latissimus</i> .....	11.50	7.00	.80	.68	2.40	1.40
<i>B. fuliginosus</i> .....	12.00	6.60	.80	.70	2.25	1.55

*Wing formula.*

*B. latissimus*: 3, 4-5-2-6-7-8-9, 1, 10. } Both with only three outer primaries  
*B. fuliginosus*: 3=4-5, 2-6-7-8, 1-9-10. } emarginated on inner webs.

*Color.*

*B. latissimus*.—Forehead dark fuliginous; tail with two broad bands of brownish gray.

*B. fuliginosus*.—Forehead white, with blackish shaft-streaks; tail with five or more narrow bands of brownish gray.

Mr. Preston, writing under date of January 25, 1886, says: "This is the third specimen that I have seen. Twelve years since my attention was called to a peculiar little black hawk flying with a number of *B. pennsylvanicus* [*i. e. latissimus*], and from that time until the capture of this specimen I had looked for another in vain. In the spring of 1884 I came very near securing another, which was in migration with others of the species. The present example was shot by myself in a small oak grove on Crystal Lake, Hancock County, Iowa, May 3, 1883. A number of Broadwings were sheltering in the woods at the time, as a cold storm prevailed. While attempting to get nearer one of them this bird flew from a small tree near me, and as its color was peculiar I secured it, and found it to be my long-sought-for 'Black Hawk.' Dissection proved it to be an adult female, with ova much enlarged. My measurements were lost, but I remember the iris to have been red."