

## NORTHERN HARRIER

*Circus cyaneus*

Other: Marsh Hawk, Hen Harrier

*C.c. hudsonius*

*C.c. cyaneus?*

### non-breeding visitor, vagrant

Northern Harriers occur throughout Eurasia and N America, breeding to tree line in the arctic and withdrawing moderately in winter, occasionally as far south as n. S America in the New World (Dement'ev and Gladkov 1951b, Cramp and Simmons 1980, AOU 1998). In the Pacific, vagrants have reached Socorro Island off Mexico, Johnston Atoll (23 Oct 1993 – 25 Jan 1994), and the Hawaiian Islands. A species of harrier (*C. dossenus*) found on O'ahu and Moloka'i, despite having shortened wings adapted to hunting in forest birds (and thus originally thought to be an *Accipiter* by Olson and James 1982b), probably evolved from an ancestor of Northern Harrier (Olson and James 1991).

There are 10 records of 12 Northern Harriers from the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*. On **Kure**, individuals were photographed 11-24 Nov 2011 ([HRBP](#) 6366-6367) and 4 Oct-18 Dec 2015 ([HRBP](#) 6370-6371). On **Midway**, one (of 2 reported birds) was collected 31 Oct 1964 (Clapp and Woodward 1968; USNM 494361, first-year female; [HRBP](#) 5445-5448 of specimen), singles were present 5 Sep-8 Oct 1990, 27 Oct 1993-1 Jan 1994, 14-29 Oct 2011 ([HRBP](#) 6365), with two birds present on the last date. Other individuals included singles on **Laysan** 2 Oct 1990, mid-Oct 2004, and 15-24 Oct 2011 (Rutt in press; [HRBP](#) 6364); and one at **French Frigate** 1-4 Oct 1996. Most birds appear to have been first-fall individuals, except for the Laysan bird from 2011 which appears to be an adult female. Photographs from non-overlapping dates in Oct-Nov 2011 ([HRBP](#) 6364-6367) indicate at least three different individuals arrived to the Northwestern Islands that fall.

In the *Southeastern Hawaiian Islands*, Dole's (1869, 1879) reference to "*Accipiter hawaii*" was attributed to Northern Harrier by Wilson and Evans (1899) and Newton (1892), who believed it resident in the Hawaiian Islands. The specimen upon which Dole's descriptions were based (BPBM 72) is of a Hawaiian Hawk (Rothschild 1900, Henshaw 1902, Olson 1994); however, Dole's observations of *Accipiter hawaii* on other islands besides Hawai'i I may have been in reference to harriers. Wilson and Evans (1899) also reported specimens of Northern Harrier taken in Honolulu in Nov 1888 (see also Newton 1892) and from one of the mountain ranges of O'ahu some years before this, but the whereabouts and identifications of these specimens are currently unknown.

Careful examination of subsequent records and ages indicate that at least 32 individual Northern Harriers have been recorded in the Southeastern Islands, on **Kaua'i** (4, 1988-2016; e.g., [HRBP](#) 0828 identifiable to genus but not species), **O'ahu** (14, 1976-2016; e.g., [HRBP](#) 5677-5680, 5693-5694, 6372; *E* 38:2-3, 40:122, 55:14), **Moloka'i** (6, 1973-2016), **Maui** (5, 1989-2003), and **Hawai'i I** (3, 1993-2014; e.g., [HRBP](#) 6368-6369). Almost all records are for fall through winter, with at least 8 birds successfully overwintering at a location and 8 birds recorded only briefly in Sep-Nov. The earliest fall arrival date was 23 Sep (2002, Haleiwa, O'ahu) and the latest spring date was 24 April (1984 near Kahuku, O'ahu). An unseasonal report of 1 from Haleakala NP, Maui, in early Jun 1992 is unsubstantiated. There were few instances where dates and ages resulted in suspected inter-island movements, unlike other large mobile species (e.g., see [Great Blue](#)

[Heron](#)), although individuals on O'ahu Sep-17 Nov 2007 and Nov-8 Dec 2013 could have been the same birds observed on Moloka'i 13 Dec 2007-Mar 2008 and 17 Dec 2013, respectively. It also appeared unlikely that any birds returned for consecutive winters. Three adult birds were identified, on Maui 15 Oct-17 Nov 1990 (male) and O'ahu 26 Nov 1994-5 Mar 1995 (female) and 4 Dec 2015-21 Mar 2016 (male; [HRBP](#) 6372), while descriptions and photographs of most to all other records pertain to first-fall birds. Favored locales include marshes and grasslands; multiple records have occurred in the Kahuku area of O'ahu and Haleakala NP, Maui, each with 6 individuals.

The specimen collected in 1964 on Midway ([HRBP](#) 5445-5448) has been identified as the N American subspecies *C. c. hudsonius* (Clapp and Woodward 1968, PP examination), and most other observed (e.g., *E* 38:2-3, Rutt in press) and photographed birds from Kure and Midway ([HRBP](#) 6365, 6370-6371) to Hawai'i I ([HRBP](#) 6368-6369) showed characters of this subspecies. The nominate Eurasian subspecies (*C. c. cyaneus*) might be expected in the Northwestern Islands, and a first-fall bird recorded on Kure in Nov 2011 ([HRBP](#) 6366-6367) may show characters more consistent with this subspecies than with *hudsonius*.

#### [Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

#### [Literature cited](#)

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