

Buteo lagopus is not a bald eagle

by J. L. Biesecker

Buteo lagopus has been visiting in the Donegal area since the holidays. He created quite a stir in our household when first noticed. In early December someone reported twice seeing an immature Bald Eagle along Route 441 near Vinegar Ferry Road. I half doubted the report and at the same time hoped that it was accurate.

Late one afternoon, just after Christmas, while driving along Engles Tollgate Road, I spotted it sitting on a telephone pole. My first thought was also **immature Bald Eagle**.

However, as he lifted into the air, I knew that he was not an Eagle. Although he was very dark and had

feathered legs, the feathers went all the way to the toes, not halfway down the tarsus as the Eagles do. The bill was not as heavy as the Eagle's and the feet were small, more suited to catching mice than fish.

Here was a very dark and beautiful Rough-legged Hawk. As if to give ample opportunity to confirm my decision, the next morning he spent five leisurely minutes circling my back yard, looking over the several old fat hens scratching about in the morning sun. I was happy to see him, but not when I realized what he was watching. My presence and the size of my Orphington hens probably helped the Rough-legged decide to look elsewhere for breakfast. Although these hawks are large, their primary food

is mice and other rodents.

Adult Rough-leg's wingspan can reach 52 inches and the body length 19 inches, including an unusually long tail. For comparison, the Bald Eagle has a wing span of up to 80 inches and a length of 32 inches. Rough-legged hawks occur in a wide variety of patterns of buff and brown, some so dark that they appear black against the sky, as our visitor does.

Like his elegant little cousin, the Sparrow Hawk, the Rough-leg can hover in one spot watching for prey. In their lighter phases, they have a conspicuous pattern of dark brown on the belly, the angle of the wing, and the banded end of the tail. The rump is light like that of the Marsh Hawk.

Remember that this is usually true for the lighter phases, but not always. These birds display considerable individuality in coloration. Broad wings and fan-shaped tail give great stamina for long periods of almost effortless soaring.

Watch the area between Rowenna and Marietta, you may see our friend sunning himself on top of a pole, watching for mice, with eyes that are eight times keener than those of a man's. When you spot him, take a few minutes to watch so that you do not mistakenly believe that you are seeing our nation's symbol. As you watch consider his traits; individuality, stamina, long-range vision, and strength. On second thought, perhaps he should be our nation's symbol.



drawing by J. L. Biesecker

Young hunters should keep their 75-76 hunting licenses

PA's young hunters are reminded to hang on to their 1975-76 hunting licenses, rather than throw them away at the end of the hunting season.

Youths under the age of 16 must show proof they have either completed a hunter education course or have held hunting licenses in PA or another state in a prior year before being

eligible to purchase hunting licenses.

Some who have taken hunter education courses have lost their certification cards, and have difficulty proving their eligibility when they go to purchase new hunting licenses.

If a youth has a previous hunting license, this is sufficient proof that he or she is eligible for another license.

Late game seasons underway

The late small game and whitetail seasons opened on Friday, December 26.

Small game species which may be hunted from December 26 through Saturday, January 17, include pheasants of both sexes in northern PA, and cottontail rabbits, squirrels, and grouse statewide. Daily and possession limits for these species are: pheasants, two and four; cottontails, four and eight; squirrels, six and twelve; and grouse, two and four.

Deer of any age or sex are available from December 26 to January 17 to archers throughout the state who have not already taken a whitetail by that time.

HUNTING CALENDAR

January 17—small game, Canada goose and archery deer seasons **close**

January 17—mink and muskrat trapping season **closes**

January 19—crow hunting season **opens**

56,000 bucks felled this year

The PA Game Commission has received deer kill report cards from more than 56,000 successful buck hunters thus far this year. The figure is about 3,000 ahead of the pace in 1974.

Report cards are no

longer a part of the hunting license, but can be obtained from the Game Commission.

Successful hunters are required by law to report deer which have been harvested. Those who take whitetails and fail to report are subject to prosecution.

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