

NORTHERN HARRIER

Circus cyaneus

Other: Marsh Hawk

C.c. hudsonius

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 6 records of 7 Northern Harriers from the *Northwestern Hawaiian Islands*, most or all pertaining to first-fall birds when initially observed. On *Midway*, one (of 2 reported birds) was collected 31 Oct 1964 (Clapp and Woodward 1968; USNM 494361, female; [HRBP](#) 5445-5448 of specimen) and singles were present 5 Sep-8 Oct 1990 and 27 Oct 1993-1 Jan 1994. Other individuals were observed on *Laysan* 2 Oct 1990 and mid-Oct 2004, and on *French Frigate* 1-4 Oct 1996.

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 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 but the whereabouts and identifications of these specimens are currently unknown.

Careful examination of subsequent records and ages indicate that at least 23-24 individual Northern Harriers have been recorded, on *Kaua'i* (2 in 1988-1993; e.g., [HRBP](#) 0828 identifiable to genus but not species), *O'ahu* (12, 1976-2009; e.g., [HRBP](#) 5677-5680, 5693-5694; *E* 38:2-3, 40:122, 55:14), *Moloka'i* (4, 1973-2008), *Maui* (5, 1989-2003), and *Hawai'i I* (1, Jan-19 Mar 1993). Almost all records are for fall through winter, with 7 birds successfully over-wintering 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 one on O'ahu 28 Sep-17 Nov 2007 possibly could have been the same bird observed on Moloka'i 13 Dec 2007-14 Mar 2008; nor did it seem likely that any birds returned for consecutive winters. Two adult birds were identified 15 Oct-17 Nov 1990 on Maui (male) and 26 Nov 1994-5 Mar 1995 on O'ahu (female), and descriptions indicate that at least 7 records pertain to first-fall birds. Favored locales include marshes and grasslands; multiple records have occurred in the Kahuku area of O'ahu (5 individuals) and Haleakala NP, Maui (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 a bird observed on Waipi'o Peninsula, O'ahu, 11 Oct 1976 showed characters of this subspecies (*E* 38:2-3). Other records lack sufficient detail for subspecific assessment. The nominate Eurasian subspecies might be expected in the Northwestern Islands.

[Acronyms and Abbreviations](#)

[Literature cited](#)

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