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Encounter with a Senior Citizen Red-tailed Hawk

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Based on this search, this East Arlington, VT, female Rufous Hummingbird appears to establish a new record farthest north, late date for the Northeast on 15 Jan 2012.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the gracious hospitality and information provided by Sharon and Pat Derosia, and assistance from Randy Schmidt both at the site on the day of banding as well as posting the bird's presence on VTBIRD, assistance from Bill Lee who accompanied me to the site, and Rosalind Renfrew and Allan Strong for sharing information on past state records.

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Encounter with a Senior Citizen Red-tailed Hawk

On 30 Nov 2010 a banded (877-89819) adult Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) was brought to The Raptor Trust avian rehabilitation center in Millington, NJ. The bird had been found on Route 17N near Monroe, NY, by a passing motorist and Good Samaritan, who stopped, picked it up from the roadway, and set out to find help. Ultimately, it was taken to wildlife rehabilitator Suzie Gilbert in Garrison, NY, who brought it to The Raptor Trust. The Trust is a large, well-known, professionally staffed all-species facility, specializing in raptors. Since its founding nearly 30 years ago, over 81,000 wild birds have been admitted for care, including over 8,000 raptors. A complete examination by the Trust's medical staff showed the bird to be a female with a fractured radius, a bacterial infection in both feet, and noticeable signs of head trauma. Quite amazing that it was alive at all.

After a call to the Bird Banding Laboratory and a thorough check of my own records, more amazing information about Red-tail 877-89819 surfaced. It had been banded as a FLY by one of my subpermittees at the Kittatinny Mountains Raptor Banding Station in Sussex County, NJ, (a research station I began in 1970 that is still in operation) on 15 Oct 1983. It had lived in the wild 27.5 years. Banding Laboratory records also showed that it was

the second oldest Red-tail ever recovered alive—the oldest was 28 years, 3 months.

To emphasize this bird's remarkable longevity, consider that as of 24 Jan 2011 there have been 195,359 Red-tailed Hawks banded in North America, but only 10,985, less than 5%, have ever been heard from again. Of these "encountered" birds, only about 1% (12 individuals) have lived 20 or more years. One was known to have lived 29 years, 9 months—a longevity record for the species. A second bird lived 28 years, 11 months. Both of these birds were recovered dead. Not only is the

bird in this account the second oldest Red-tail recovered alive, but the fourth oldest ever known in the wild.

Unfortunately, due to the severity of her injuries, this senior citizen Red-tailed Hawk cannot be released back into the wild. She has been awarded a permanent home at The Raptor Trust, where she has an important job of fostering young, orphaned Red-tails.

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Red -tailed hawk
Photo by R. Pantle

I Would Not Have Known if They Were Not Banded

Wait a minute; let me check that band number again. According to the database, I was the last one to capture this particular male and only two months ago at that. That did not seem right. Earlier that day, 10 Jun 2010, I was surveying Black-capped Vireos (*Vireo atricapillus*) in an area burned by a large wildfire back in early April. Black-capped Vireos prefer early successional habitats, but much of this area was just too early successional. However, the fire had been patchy and some areas did not burn

hot enough to kill all the trees and shrubs back to the ground and these had sprouted new leaves a few weeks after the fire. In one such area, I had spotted a pair of vireos and a flash of orange revealed that the male was color-banded. Fort Hood Military Reservation (Coryell and Bell Cos., TX), where I work, has hosted numerous researchers over the years, but I could not remember whether anyone had studied and banded vireos in the area of the burn. I followed the pair for about 15 min before I clearly saw all of the male's bands; dark green over orange on the left leg and white over silver on the right. I could hardly wait to get back to the office and look this one up in the database.