

**A Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) observation in Sooke:
A Second Sight Record for British Columbia.
By Rick Toochin and Paul Levesque (Revised: April 2014).**

Introduction and Distribution

The Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is a species of falcon that is found breeding across Eurasia from Great Britain across to Scandinavia, throughout Russia, and to Siberia (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The Eurasian Hobby is a highly migratory species that migrates south to winter in North Africa, India, and South China (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). In North America, the Eurasian Hobby has been recorded several times in the Aleutian Islands, the Bering Sea region, and on St. George and St. Paul Islands (West 2008). The Eurasian Hobby has also been recorded twice on the east coast of North America with one record from Cape Spear, Newfoundland, on May 21, 2004 (Maybank 2004) and another recent photographic record from Manomet, Massachusetts on May 18, 2011 (Anonymous 2012). The only other west coast record away from Alaska is a bird photographed at Discovery Park, in Seattle Washington on October 20, 2001 (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WBRC 2012). The species is accidental in British Columbia with 2 well documented sight records (Campbell *et al.* 1990, Toochin 2012)

Identification and Similar Species

The Eurasian Hobby has a unique shape that makes it readily separated from all North American falcons. In adult plumage, this species is readily identified by its bright red leggings (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The head is black from the crown to the nape (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). It has a unique facial pattern, with a very white throat and neck with a bold black whisker that is thick and round in shape (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). There is also a dark mark on adults that is found before the nape and curves down into the white of the cheek (Jonsson 1992). There is a thin white line over the eye (Jonsson 1992). The back and wings are a dark gray color with the primaries on the upper side of the wings showing a darker blackish color (Jonsson 1992). The underside of the wings is heavily barred in dark and light bars throughout the wing except the dark primaries and the dark line that follows the secondary edge (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The upper side of the tail is also dark gray in color (Jonsson 1992). The underside of the tail is banded with dark and light bands (Jonsson 1992). The legs are yellow (Brazil 2009). The bird has very long wings that, on a sitting bird, go to and just barely beyond the tail tip (Jonsson 1992). On flying birds, the wings are broad-based with long tapered wing-tips (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The tail, when not spread, is long in shape, and in flight, is often fanned (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009). The flight style is another unique feature of Eurasian Hobby. It is a superior and fast flier, with great bursts of speed (Brazil 2009). Among North American falcons, the large wing shape to body ratio makes Eurasian Hobby most similar to Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) (Clark and Wheeler 1987). Though the Eurasian Hobby is

only a bit larger than a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), this species doesn't give an observer the same overall size impression of a Merlin. This is due to the larger wings and long tail on a small-bodied bird (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). Immature birds are similar to adults in shape and structure (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). Immature Eurasian Hobbies have a dark facial pattern where the dark line is thick and extends through the eye towards the nape, but doesn't connect to the nape, and is separated by white that extends up from the neck giving the bird obvious white cheeks (Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The dark whisker is thick and extends down from the eye onto the face but is surrounded by a pale throat and white neck (Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The round head is dark with light brown edges that are paler at the bill base and extend up the head onto the top of the crown (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). There is a pale line above the eye (Brazil 2009). The breast is a pale brownish color with thick long dark streaks that extend vertically across the breast down the sides and onto the leggings (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The under tail coverts are also buffy pale brown in color with light faint dark streaks (Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The bill is blue-based with a black tip and is small and curved in shape (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The legs and feet are yellow in color (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The tail is long and barred on the underside with light tan color and grayish on the upper side lacking heavy bars (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The rump is the same color as the back and upper side of the tail, gray with light brown edges (Jonsson 1992). The back of the bird is dark gray with light brownish edges to the feathers that extend down onto the back edges of the folded wings (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The underside of the wings is a tan color overall, but has heavy dark bars as in adults with darker blackish primary tips and a dark line that runs along the secondary edge (Jonsson 1992, Mullarney *et al.* 2009). The folded wings on sitting birds extend past the tail tip in all ages (Clark and Wheeler 1987, Jonsson 1992, Brazil 2009, Mullarney *et al.* 2009).

Occurrence and Documentation

On September 29, 2006, while hawk watching in Sooke, an immature Eurasian Hobby was observed by the authors as it flew into a tree approximately 200 meters from the authors (Cecile 2007). The bird was observed for a few minutes through telescopes and binoculars, then it quickly flew south. Unfortunately this observation was not photo-documented. The timing of the Sooke record fits well with when this species migrates in Europe and Asia; the Eurasian Hobby is known to migrate south from Europe and Asia from August – September (Jonsson 1992). Our observation occurred during the fall peak of hawk migration on southern Vancouver Island when there are traditionally hundreds of birds of prey moving through the area. There were no leggings or leg bands seen on the bird to indicate that it came from captive origin. There is a possibility that the bird rode on a ship from Asia to North America, but this can't be proven. In the Birds of Canada and in Volume 2 of the Birds of British Columbia, there is mention of a single observer sighting for a Eurasian Hobby from Merritt in the Nicola

Valley on May 22, 1982 (Godfrey 1986, Campbell et al. 1990). This record is considered hypothetical as there was no photographic evidence (Godfrey 1986, Campbell et al. 1990). However, given that there are 2 recent records from the east coast of North America that fall into this time frame, as well as our observation, this record should be re-examined.

Given this species increasing appearance in the Aleutian Islands, the Eurasian Hobby may well turn up again in British Columbia and be photo-documented in the future.

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