

LOUISIANA BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM

1. English and Scientific names: Chihuahuan Raven
2. Number of individuals, sexes, ages, general plumage (e.g., 2 in alternate plumage):
One age and sex unknown
3. Locality: Cameron Parish
Specific Locality: Rutherford Beach
4. Date(s) when observed: 05/12/2019

5. Time(s) of day when observed: ca. 12:51-ca. 1:20 pm

6. Reporting observer and address: Paul Conover, Lafayette, LA

7. Other observers accompanying reporter who also *identified* the bird(s): Dave Patton

8. Other observers who independently identified the bird(s):

9. Light conditions (position of bird in relation to shade and to direction and amount of light):
Sunny, bird overhead at various angles, a black bird against the sky.

10. Optical equipment (type, power, condition): Zeiss 10s, Nikon D3300 with 200 mm lens, Nikon Fieldscope 3 20-60x.

11. Distance to bird(s): at its closest, the bird was probably a couple of hundred feet from us.

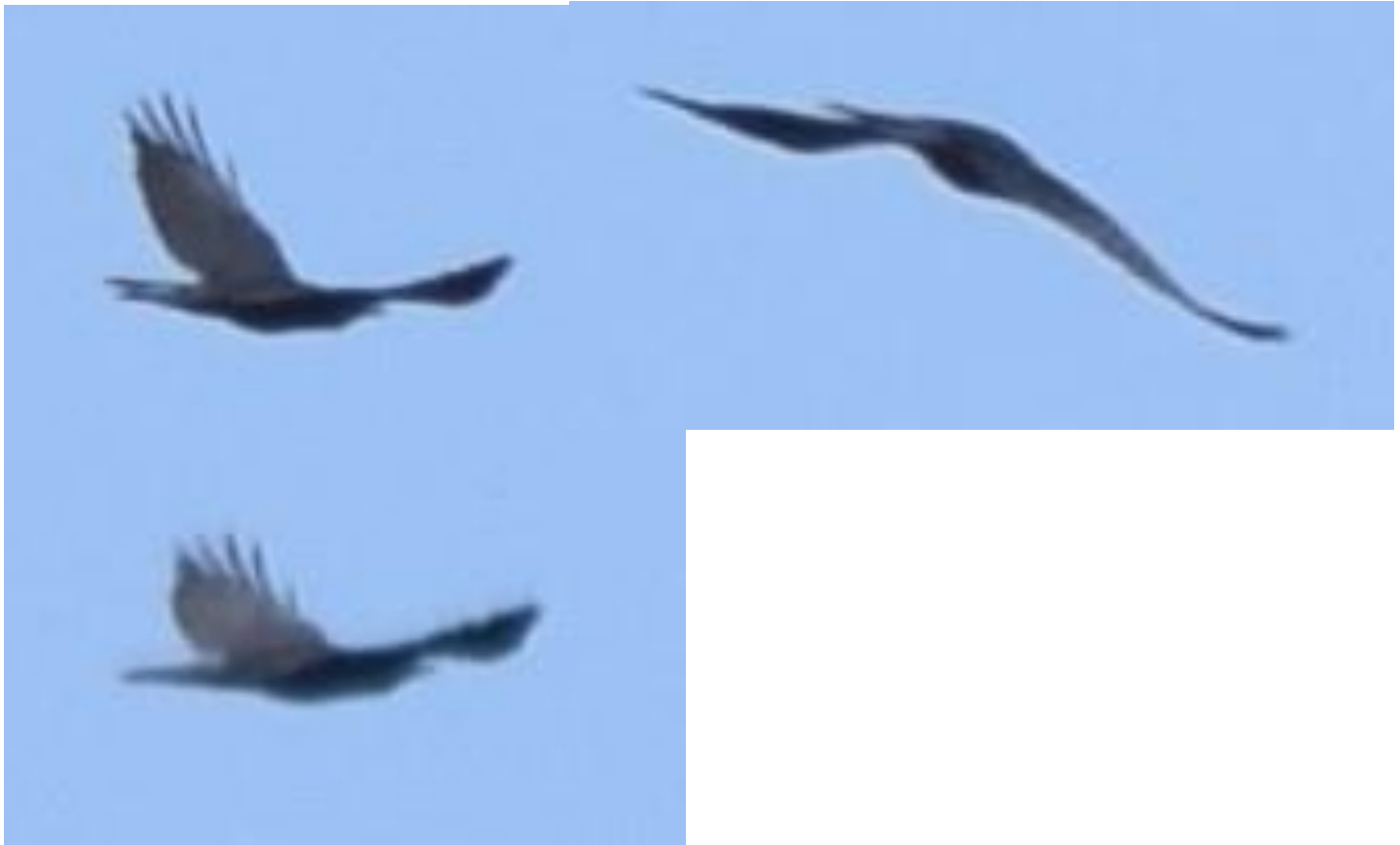
12. Duration of observation: Looking at time stamps, it would appear that we watched the bird for almost 30 minutes.

13. Habitat: Gulf beach. Bird was flying over the land and over the Gulf at times.

14. Behavior of bird / circumstances of observation: As Dave and I were walking through scrub a few hundred yards to the west of the fence gate, we noticed a bird several hundred yards to the west of us being set upon by swallows. We got our glasses on it and realized it was a corvid, and while it didn't seem obviously larger than a crow at the distance, it had the shape of a raven. As any corvid on Rutherford Beach in the recent era is remarkable (this was the first I've seen at least since Hurricane Rita in 2005), we immediately started taking pictures. The bird was slowly drifting east, and passed to the north of us. Once it passed us, we got in the car, and headed east as fast as we could on hills of sand above the tide line, but couldn't catch the bird. Once we got to the fence and crossed the gate, we were able to hit flat land and get up to a speed of 40 mph; we caught up to the bird after about a mile. At this point, the bird flew out to join some Laughing Gulls over the water within 100-200 yards of the beach, and then began to circle and gain altitude with the gulls. After a while the bird began to descend to the NE, and we intercepted it as it came down to a couple of hundred feet. The bird soon passed us again, so we raced onward ahead the raven to the town of Rutherford Beach so that we could get position on it. The bird descended a bit over the town, then began to circle with a gull and drift north of the town. We went to Rutherford Beach Road, parked, and watched the bird circle over the area north of the camps for several minutes. The bird ascended to a high altitude, drifted south, and began to follow the beach to the east. We watched it flying high above the beach until it faded from view, with Dave remarking that the bird could fly undetected over anyone at that altitude.

15. Description (include only what was actually seen, *not what "should" have been seen*):

A dark corvid somewhat larger than a crow, fairly slender-bodied and with swept-back wings that gave the bird an almost raptor-like silhouette. In terms of size, seen in a small group of Laughing Gulls, the bird was roughly in the same wingspan range as the gulls, although with broader-based wings.





Bend of the wing was pronounced and fairly close to body; outer wing was long and curved backward, curve accentuated by the short p10.

Tail extension beyond rear of wings about equal in length to distance from front of wings to rear of wings. Tail appeared unevenly forked, with apparently missing rectrices on one side of tail. The complete half of the tail showed graduation into a rounded wedge.





Head and neck extension about $2/3$ of tail extension.

Bill large and deep at base, tapering quickly to form a thick wedge shape.

Several photos suggest nasal bristles extending about $2/3$ of the way down the bill, adding to the thickness of the bill base. One photo by Patton shows the nasal bristles clearly.





Bird in flight was very agile, gliding quickly and gracefully. Patton has photos showing that the raven was flycatching.

One of Patton's photos shows paler areas on the side of the neck that may be reflected light or perhaps a glimpse of the pale base colors of the neck feathering.

16. Voice: The bird was never heard to call.

17. Similar species (include how they were eliminated by your observation):

Crows eliminated broadly by overall shape, more specifically perhaps by wing formula.

Chihuahuan vs Common Raven the main ID point. Size was a determining factor in my ID as Chihuahuan over Common: This bird seemed large but not huge. When the bird was first seen, separation from crows was the first step. Conviction about ID was based more on differences in shape than a perception of vastly greater size.

BNA lists mass range of Texas CHRA as 378-667 g versus mass range of the CORA subspecies found in Texas as 855.5-987 g. This raven didn't appear to be on the large end in wingspan or mass. In direct comparison to Laughing Gulls, the raven was not much larger than the gulls in wingspan although the raven had broader-based wings and heavier proportions made more pronounced by its solidly dark color.

Tail shape seems to match CHRA better than CORA, i.e. rounded vs more rhomboid.

Length of nasal bristles cited as a fieldmark in several sources. Patton's picture shows the length of the bristles on this bird, which appear to extend about 2/3 toward the bill tip. My photos lack the focus of Patton's, but bill shape in profile photos suggests the same extent of bristles.

18. Photographs or tape recordings obtained? (by whom? attached?): Photos by Conover and Patton. Video by Conover.

19. Previous experience with this species: Experience with both ravens in various parts of their range.

20. This description is written from fresh memory and photos

21. Are you positive of your identification? If not, explain: Yes.

22. Date: 5/14/2019