

Two Ornithologists, a Century Apart

For more than 15 years I had known about the William Savage paintings, but I had never seen them. What attracted me to them were two possible rarities, which Savage's son had reported as Harris's Hawk and Gray Hawk and were labeled Black Warrior and Gray Star Buzzard. When I looked at the actual paintings, I realized that the Savages had misidentified those birds. Yet I was surprised by the quality and details of the paintings and became intrigued by the story behind them, which was partially unveiled by Savage's diaries. I set three goals: to accurately identify all the birds in the paintings, to summarize the information in a logical order, and to photograph each painting in color.

Although most of the birds were easily identified from Savage's representations, many had never been labeled. Few of the paintings bore dates or locations, although the diaries revealed many clues. If species names did appear on the paintings, they were often inaccurate based on today's authorities. (It is also possible that Savage labeled some of the paintings years after he painted them; on July 27, 1894, he wrote in his diary: "write names on more pictures" before exhibiting them in Fairfield.) The grouping of some species is often quite illogical to the modern observer. Savage may have copied single birds into composite paintings, which he was fond of making in his later years.

The end product of my three-



↑ American Kestrel and Red-tailed Hawk

This adult rufous morph Red-tailed Hawk is a rare variant of the species. Savage's son Walter identified the specimen as a Harris's Hawk, based on a description by ornithologist Elliott Coues. William Savage labeled it Black Warrior. However, Coues equates Black Warrior with Harlan's Hawk, which is today considered another variant of Red-tailed Hawk. This puzzling hawk along with the Gray Star Buzzard (page 72), sparked the author's interest in the William Savage collection of paintings and diaries.

year project is a two-volume compilation of all known information pertaining to all 245 paintings (which depict 397 birds of 255 species, plus 22 mammals of 13 species). A color representation of each painting (electronically scanned from the slides) is followed by the accurate common names of the birds represented (based on the *American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds, Seventh Edition* [1998]); the

names assigned by Savage; any other information written on the painting or relevant to it (including quoted diary entries); and notes on the quality and condition of each painting. I have donated these volumes and a complete set of color slides to the museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines), where they can be accessed by researchers interested in Savage, his paintings, or ornithology. —Thomas H. Kent

NOTE ON SOURCES

The primary sources for this article are the paintings, original diaries (1856-1908), and typed transcripts (1863-1908), all housed at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines). The paintings are in the museum collections; the diaries and other written or printed material (including a few hand-written speeches) are in Special Collections. The diaries for March 1856 through October 1863 were serialized in the *Annals of Iowa* (Oct. 1933, Jan. 1934, Oct. 1934, Oct. 1935, Oct. 1936, and Jan. 1937). Lewis D. Savage made available in original and typescript form the diary of his father, David L. Savage, and guided me on a tour of the farm site and surroundings frequented by William Savage. Both Dr. Alfred D. Savage (David's grandson) and Lewis D. Savage provided many personal documents, photographs, and newspaper clippings about William Savage and the entire Savage clan. Thanks also to these State Historical Society staff: curator Bill Johnson, registrar Jodi Evans, and audio-visual archivist Mary Bennett. They facilitated my photographing the Savage paintings over several days.