

Mississippi Kite
29 May 1978
Cardinal Marsh, Winnesheik Co., IA
*Tom Stone Jr., *Francis Moore

Record Number: 81-ML
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Tom Stone Jr.
Francis L. Moore (also field notes sent later)

LETTER

Francis Moore to Tom Kent, 30 Aug 1984

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 48:72
Records Committee: IBL 55:56

VOTE (1981): I-II, 4-III, 2-IV

IV, Francis Moore saw this bird and agrees with ID. In light of #11 being a very unlikely date and #12 rejected by Records Committee, I remain doubtful.

III, Francis Moore may be able to shed more light on this record.

III, documentation by other obs. eg Francis Moore.

II, Can 8 observers, 4 of whom also 'independently' saw bird, be wrong?

III, Description O.K. but not great. Important features seen. I question why other observers did not document, e.g. Moore.

REVOTE (by mail, after receiving documentation from material from Moore): 5-III, 2-IV

III, at least.

IV, I wrote asking for field notes, but did not get a response. Both Moore and Stone descriptions fit Mississippi Kite. Moore saw yellow base to bill, Stone did not. Stone saw dark eye lores, Moore did not. Stone saw banded under tail, Moore did not. It seems highly likely that this was a Mississippi Kite, but Stone identified an Apr 12 bird the next year that seems unlikely and Moore delayed 5 years 10 months in reporting and did not produce his original notes. I think reporting has improved since 1978.

IV, Two hour difference in time of observation 11:15-11:30 AM vs. 1:05 to 1:45. If this can be logically explained I would consider a 3 vote. Moore's notes better than Stone's. Why a 5 year delay in getting them?

III, The bird seen must have impressed Moore. So much so, that he seeks to get it approved at this late date. But there are several questions I have: Why now, after five years, has Moore sent the record for review? On what basis is Moore's 'new' document? On memory? Factual, descriptive notes taken during or, recently after, the sighting? Also, why do the documentations vary so widely in time? Finally what will be gained by accepting the record? Will it be an unequivocal recent record for the Kite, or will it be a check mark for Moore. What is the impetus?

III, Excellent description, even allowing for passage of time. Field notes made at time. Corroborating sighting by Stone adds credence, even though rejected at time. (I suggest resubmission of Waubonsie State Park records submitted by Stone).

Records Committee, Iowa Ornithologists' Union
Mississippi Kite

Printed: 08/27/93
29 May 1978 RC No. 81-ML (cont)

REVOTE (with original field notes from Moore, at meeting, 8 Sep
1984): 7-III

Halmi, N. S., 1978, Field reports. Iowa Bird Life 48:72

Diurnal Raptors. The Mississippi Kite has been extirpated from Iowa since 1890. But it breeds again in s. Illinois, and has been recently seen in c. Illinois, Wisconsin and s. Minnesota, so its reappearance in Iowa was not entirely surprising. On May 29, Tom Stone, Jr., 13, informed me over the telephone that he and 7 others had observed a white-headed, black-tailed kite at Cardinal M., near Cresco in n. Iowa. The description was supported by written documentation. There

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation

by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

~~81-ML~~ 81-ML (1)

SPECIES: MISSISSIPPI KITE

DATE SEEN: May 29, 1978

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Cardinal Marsh, Winneshiek County

OBSERVERS: Francis Moore

DATE OF REVIEW: 1984

METHOD OF REVIEW: Circulation by mail to Committee; discussion at meeting.

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: III

COMMENTS:

Some doubts were raised about this record, primarily due to the long delay before submission, and some minor discrepancies between the details submitted and those submitted by Tom Stone. However later submission of the original field notes convinced the Committee of the correctness of the observation. These excellent notes allowed acceptance of Iowa's first record of this species.

The opinions expressed here are based on the information available to the Committee and should not necessarily preclude an alternate interpretation by those who observed the bird firsthand.

Any action may be re-reviewed upon submission of additional evidence.

Explanation of Classification:

- I = labeled, diagnostic specimen, photograph, or recording available for review by the Committee
- II = acceptable sight record documented independently by 3 or more observers
- III = acceptable sight record documented by 1 or 2 observers
- IV = probably correct record, but not beyond doubt
- V = record with insufficient evidence to judge
- VI = probably incorrect identification, escapee, or otherwise unacceptable record

Classification is based on the highest category agreed upon by six of seven committee members.

81-M L ~~207a~~

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Iowa Bird Life

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

FIELD REPORTS EDITOR

DR. THOMAS KENT
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

7 May 1984

Dear Francis,

Enclosed are copies of your documentations as you requested.

The sharp-tailed sparrow does not need to go to the Records Committee (casual species at expected time and habitat and adequate description). I will add it to the file of records for this species.

Questions about the Mississippi Kite:

How does the present form differ from your original notes?

A copy of your original notes would strengthen the report, as the main question will be 'How much of the data was filled in from memory?'

The other documentation was from "Tom Stone Jr & Sen" -- were both present? They also list Ted Stone, Eleanor Corwin, Lois Sherman & Antoinette Comarata as being present.

It may take a little while to create and evaluate this record. It is an important one.

I plan to find another in SW Iowa next week!

Tom.

Iowa Ornithologists' Union

81-122

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A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

FIELD REPORTS EDITOR

DR. THOMAS KENT
211 Richards Street
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

August 30, 1984

Tom,

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you on the notes on the Mississippi Kite sighting in 1978. They had been temporarily misplaced during one of my clean-ups. Enclosed is a copy of the notes I took on day of sighting. I hope they will help!

To answer your questions in your May 7, 1984 letter:

My notes differ somewhat from the documentation but not very much. Some come from memory, some from notes.

Both Tom Stone Sr. and Tom Stone Jr. were there. Ted Stone, Eleanor Corwin, Lois Sherman, Antoinette Comoratta and Russell Hays were also on the trip. Most of them wouldn't know a Mississippi Kite if they saw it pictured in a book with a large heading noting that it was a Mississippi Kite. It was a Waterloo Audubon Field Trip.

It was good birding with you, Tom and John on 8/26. Hope this helps resolve any questions you or the records committee may have. See you in Muscatine 9/8 + 9/9.

Francis

Middlewestern Prairie Region
(Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio)

81-ML

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BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD.

- Species Mississippi kite 2. Number: (1)
3. Location ~~Cresco~~ cardinal Marsh near Cresco
4. Date: May 29 5. Time Bird seen: 1:05 to 1:45
6. Description of size, shape and color-pattern (describe in great detail all parts of the plumage, and beak and feet coloration, in addition, to the diagnostic characteristics, but include only what actually was seen in the field):
Size: about 12-14 inches long wings long and started
feet - ~~yellow~~
Color of body and wings: body bluish gray darker on top. Head silverish almost pure white. Eyes black. Beak: Black. 40"
Wings: dark bluish gray with silverish secondaries. 30-35"
7. Description of voice, if heard: not heard. Turn over
8. Description of behavior: spectacular maneuvering, such as swooping, soaring, ~~flapping~~ unlike any other hawk I have seen.
9. Habitat - general: similar to a swallows flight, also catching dragonflies in mid air with talons.
specific: marshy area bordered with woodlands.
10. Similarly appearing species which are eliminated by questions 6, 7 & 8, Explain:
peregrine falcon: has black mustache and stoops unlike kite.
Merlin - flies with steady flapping and has smaller wingspan
Marsh Hawk - has white rump patch.
11. Distance (how measured)? About 50 yards at closest. 12. Optical equipment: 7 to 10 power binoculars, 20x60 scope
13. Light (sky, light on bird, position of sun in relation to bird and you): mostly cloudy with sun appearing shortly while watching bird. Was behind our backs.
14. Previous experience with this species and similarly appearing species: no experience with this species.
15. Other observers: Tom G. Stone Jr., Tom G. Stone, Russ Hayes, Francis Moore, Ted Stone, Eleanor Corwin, Lois Sherman, Antoinette
16. Did the others agree with your identification? Yes. Everyone. Comarata.
17. Other observers who independently identified this bird: Tom Stone Jr., Tom Stone, Russ Hayes, Francis Moore.
18. Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and how did these influence this description:
Birds of North America by Robbin and Singer had best description and best.
Birds of Eastern North America by Roger Tory Peterson
9. How long after observing this bird did you first write this description? Two days
Tom Stone Jr. + Sen. Address: 1632 Woodmayer Dr.
- Signature
Date: 15/31/781 City, State: Waterloo, Iowa

(over)

If you watch birds solely for your own enjoyment, there really is no need to describe your observations in writing. But, if you have seen something unusual and want to share this experience with others, a written description is essential. It is true your immediate friends who know and respect your ability probably will accept your report without question, but what about those who do not know you, particularly the bird students 100 years from now who cannot know you? Also, what about the habitual skeptics? And most importantly, what about the compilers of regional bird lists who probably will insist that records be scientifically sound? All these critics will investigate your observation not because they assume you are wrong, but merely because they ordinarily expect verification. Whether the individual demanding verification realizes it or not, in doing so, he is employing a basic rule of the scientific method.

If your observation involves a common species during a season of abundance, verification is achieved simply by returning there again in season. If, however, the observation involves a rare species, or a common species out of season, verification is not obtained easily and special documentation is necessary. The best documentation is a collected specimen, and many bird students insist this is the only acceptable evidence. However, others recognize the importance and reliability of sight records accumulated by the experienced field observer, and maintain that even extraordinary sight records are acceptable if accompanied by an adequate verifying description.

It must be emphasized that a request for documentation is not an affront, but an effort to perpetuate a record by obtaining concrete evidence which may be permanently preserved for all to examine. This procedure is required for every extraordinary observation irrespective of the observer.

It should also be pointed out that with the great photographic equipment now available, species identification from photographs are possible. Such species documentation are highly desirable and should be sent to the state editors or to large museums.

Description of Tail: Black, underside light Gray with three black bands. Seems to ^{be} between stage of an ~~immature~~ immature bird and an Adult bird. The rest of the body of bird look like an adult. Except for the underside of the tail.

What species? Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) How many? 1 adultLocation? Cardinal MarshType of habitat? Edge of woods near open cattail marshWhen? date(s): May 29, 1978 time: 11:15 am to 11:30 a.m.Who? your name and address: Francis L. Moore, 336 Fairfield St., Waterloo, IA 50703others with you: Russell Hays, Tom Stone, Sr.others before or after you: None

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

The bird was flying near the edge of the woods when someone spotted it flying from the N.E. side of the open marsh toward the south. At first someone called it a Merlin but when I looked at it through my binoculars I immediately noticed that the bird had a very light colored head unlike any Merlin that I had ever seen. The wings were pointed a lot like a falcon's wings but the tail was one solid dark gray color and seemed too long for a falcon it was also straight and not wedge shaped like a falcon. At that time I located the bird in my telescope and followed it for the rest of the viewing time with it. Through the telescope the tail was a very dark charcoal to black color. The belly and breast were a light gray color. The feet were yellow as was the rear portion of the bill. The front of the bill was black. The wings, upper and lower surfaces, were a dark gray color. The under tail coverts were a little lighter in color than the belly and breast. The back was a dark gray color the same as the wings. The head was the most striking part of the bird about the same color as the under-tail coverts, a very light gray to ~~light~~ white color. No song was heard. Continued on back.

Similar species and how eliminated: White-tailed Kite does not have as dark a back as this bird had and is also too light below. This bird definitely did not have a deeply forked tail as a Swallow-tailed Kite would have had.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment: Sunny, excellent viewing conditions. approx 200 feet at closest using 7X50 Pentax binoculars and Bushnell Spacemaster 20X60 telescope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: No experience with this speciesReferences and persons consulted before writing description: Robbins after making notesHow long before field notes made? 5 min. this form completed? 5 years 10 months

MAIL TO: T. H. Kent, Field Reports Editor, 211 Richards Street, Iowa City IA 52240

~~84-9~~
81-ML

As the bird flew over the open marsh, while watching it through the 20x60 telescope, many times I saw it catch dragon flies and eat them on the wing. It caught and ate about a dozen dragon flies as I watched and it was always in the air. The birds flight pattern reminded me of a swallow, the way it twisted and dove after the dragon flies. It was a very graceful bird in the air, and flew a lot like a large swallow. There is no doubt in my mind as to whether this is a Mississippi Kite or not. I saw the bird for a long time through my telescope and am sure of its identity.

5/29/78

Mississippi Kite - Adult plumage

Cardinal Marsh near Cresco

Sunny

Very boyant swallow like fight. It looked like a very large gray swallow as it caught dragon flies in the air and ate them while on the wing.

Head almost white, a very light gray color

Wings long and pointed like a falcon.

Bill black with yellowish base. Feet yellow color.

Flew over the marsh in front of us at approx. 200 - 500 feet. Viewing time about 15 minutes from about 11:10 or 11:15

A very beautiful and agile bird.

~~81-MC~~ 81-MC

tail held fairly straight not wedge shaped. Tail also very dark color, charcoal gray or black.

upper and lower surfaces of wings medium gray color as compared to tail. Primaries darker.

Undertail coverts about same color as head maybe a shade darker, but lighter than belly and breast.

