

Mississippi Kite
26 Sep 1983
Luster Heights, Allamakee Co., IA
Jon Stravers, John Bowles, Dean Roosa
IBL 56:43

Record Number: 85-AA
Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Jon Stravers/John Bowles/Dean Roosa

REFERENCE

Records Committee: IBL 56:43

VOTE: 1-II, 4-III, 1-IV, 1-V

III, Minimal description but seems to cover key points.

III, Need more details from authors: (1) Who is "we"? authors?
(2) No mention of size or head features. Exact dates of MN and WI sightings should be given. Features that exclude other species should be dealt with in a separate paragraph. If Roosa saw this bird and other points are filled in, I would accept this record.

V, I don't have enough information on this one. The description as given could probably fit a male Harrier.

III, David McIlrath [Bowles and Roosa crossed out].

IV, Though identification may be correct the details are sparse. The description could fit a male N. Harrier. According to guides the Mississippi Kite has a distinctly notched tail, not squared.

III, Adult is rather distinctive; description satisfactory.

REVOTE (at meeting, 5 Oct 1985): 2-III, 3-IV, 2-V

85AA

Summary of Review of an Ornithologic Observation
by the Records Committee
of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union

SPECIES: Mississippi Kite

DATE SEEN: 26 September 1983

SITE OF OBSERVATION: Allamakee County

OBSERVERS: Jon Stravers, Dean Roosa, John Boles

DATE OF REVIEW: October 1985

METHOD OF REVIEW: Committee discussion

CLASSIFICATION OF RECORD: V

COMMENTS: This record was not submitted directly to the Committee, but was submitted to Iowa Bird Life for publication. Because of its importance, the Committee felt it should be evaluated.

A major concern was the lack of diagnostic details which could clearly eliminate male Northern Harrier. Ordinarily, such a possibility would not be considered significant, but the extreme rarity of Mississippi Kite in the upper Mississippi valley (as opposed to the south of St. Louis) dictates consideration of other rather unlikely possibilities.

Finally, because the evaluation was made of a submitted paper, it was not certain whether all three authors were also observers, or whether just one or two of them were.

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.

1985-AA

Sighting of a Mississippi Kite in Northeastern Iowa

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Although Dinsmore et al. (1984) list the Mississippi Kite (Ictinia missississippiensis) as extirpated from Iowa, they mentioned recent sightings in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois and cited evidence of increases in successful nesting of these birds in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas (Parker and Ogden 1979). While specimens were collected in Iowa before 1900 (Bailey 1918, DuMont 1933), there is no definitive evidence of the species in the state for the subsequent period when it declined sharply throughout its range, including eastern United States and central Mississippi Valley.

During the fall of 1983, David McIlrath (Effigy Mounds National Monument) and Stravers, conducted a survey of raptor migration along the Mississippi River in northeastern Iowa (funded by the Iowa Conservation Commission). The observation point was located 5.1 miles north of Marquette, Allamakee County, near the Luster Heights State Correctional facility. On the afternoon of 26 September 1983, we observed a single adult Mississippi Kite migrating southward. The wind was southerly at less than 5 mph and the day was clear and warm (75°F). At 4:15 p.m. (CDT) the bird flew directly over the observation point, dipping slowly, less than 50 feet above the ground. We could clearly see that the bird lacked streaking or banding on the entire underside, as is common in other raptor species. Its breast was smooth and grayish from neck to feet, while its tail was long, dark, and squared at the end. The long, slender, dark wings bent conspicuously as the bird dipped and rose in its flight parallel to the river.

85-AA
Flight parallel to the river.

Even though falcon-like in appearance, we knew immediately that the bird was different from previously observed migrating hawks (Accipiters, Buteos, and Falcons). As we watched, we felt certain that it was a kite and made positive identification from descriptions in Peterson (1980) and Robbins et al. (1966). A check of other raptor migration literature showed two similar sightings, a single Mississippi Kite observed during a similar study on the Wisconsin side of the Mississippi River two years earlier at Cassville (approximately 30 miles downstream from our observation point) Brophy and Sherman 1982), and another in southwestern Minnesota in October of 1982 (Bonkoski 1984).

These records, along with the general recovery reported by Parker and Ogden (1979), suggest that the Mississippi Kite may be returning to the Upper Midwest and should be considered a rare migrant in Iowa.

Literature Cited

- Bailey, B.H. 1918. The raptorial birds of Iowa. Iowa Geological Survey Bulletin No. 6 238pp.
- Bonkoski, J. 1984. Mississippi kite in Olmstead County. The Loone 56(1):70-71.
- Brophy, T. and D. Sherman. 1982. The Eagle Valley migration. The Eagle, 11(3):6-9.
- Dinsmore, J.J., T.H. Kent, D. Koenig, P.C. Petersen, and D.M. Roosa, 1984. Iowa Birds, Iowa State Univ. Press, 226pp.
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- Peterson, R.T. 1980. A field guide to the birds east of the Rockies. Houghton Mifflin Co., 387pp.
- Robbins, C.S., B. Bruun, H.S. Zim, 1966. A field guide to the birds of North America. Golden Press, 340pp.