

American Swallow-tailed Kite  
13 Jul 1867  
Denison, Crawford Co., IA

Record Number: 93-BO  
Classification: A-D

young still in nests; Allen 1868, Anderson 1907

REFERENCES

Allen, J.A. 1868. XIII. Notes on birds observed in western Iowa in the months of July, August, and September ... Memoirs of the Boston Society of Natural History 1:488-502.

Anderson 1907

VOTE: 5 A-D

A-D, Although the description is sketchy, Allen observed these birds himself, the flight behavior fits Swallow-tailed Kite rather than Mississippi Kite, and this is a very easy bird to identify. I would accept this as confirmed nesting. /thk

A-D, This record does provide suggestive details, however I base acceptance primarily on the available data regarding distribution of this species -- see Palmer, Handbook of N. Am. Birds, vol 4. This data, together with suggestive (but not by any means diagnostic) description allows acceptance. Habitat and actions as well as date of occurrence are consistent with identification. /wrs

loving species, and a corresponding scarcity of those whose favorite haunts are the forest. In its western part there are still considerable tracts quite primitive in character, while in no portion of the western half has man greatly modified its fauna and flora. A change, however, has commenced; and, with these broad prairies, almost inexhaustible in fertility, inviting the industry of the East, twenty years, judging from the rapidity of the transformation now in progress in the eastern part of the State, and which has already swept over Northern Illinois, will see these virgin tracts converted into cultivated farms, with orchards, clumps of sheltering trees, and wind-breaking hedges; the wild weeds and grasses supplanted by cultivated and intruding species, with hardly less positive changes in the animals. At present, as the really characteristic birds of the region, we would enumerate the Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris* = *E. cornuta* Boie), the Lark Finch (*Chondestes grammaca* Bon.), the Meadow Lark (*Sturnella magna* Sw.<sup>1</sup>), the Yellow-winged, Savannah, and Black-throated Sparrows (*Coturniculus passerinus* Bon., *Passerculus savanna* Bon., *Euspiza americana* Bon.), the Prairie Hen (*Cupidonia cupido* Baird), and, in a less degree, the Sand-hill Crane, (*Grus canadensis* Temm.), and Field Plover (*Actiturus Bartramius* Bon.) Also, as characteristic features, the scarcity of the Robin (*Turdus migratorius* L.), the Blue Bird (*Sialia sialis* Bd.), the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo horreorum* Bart.), Chipping and Song Sparrows (*Spizella socialis* Bon., *Melospiza melodia* Bd.), other Sparrows and the common Crow (*Corvus americanus* Aud.)

In explanation of the following list I may add that Boonesboro, in Boone Co., near the centre of the State, where I spent from July 3d to July 12th, was my first point of observation. Here six days were passed entirely in the broad timber belt which skirts the Des Moines River, in the deep, heavily wooded and deeply shaded ravine formed by Pole Cat Creek, which gave me early in the season a favorable opportunity to become somewhat familiar with the forest haunting species. July 13th I passed on nearly a hundred miles westward to Denison, on the Boyer River, and distant from the Missouri, in a direct line, but little more than thirty miles. Here my field of observation embraced both timber and prairie, and during the week passed in it I became quite familiar with the species of the prairie. July 20th I joined my friend Mr. O. H. St. John, who was prosecuting the geological survey of the State, and with him, during the following two months, traversed seven counties (Crawford, Sac, Greene, Dallas, Guthrie, Audubon, and Carroll), crossing several of them repeatedly and in different directions. Camping wherever night found us, and spending considerable time in the narrow belts of timber bordering the three Coon Rivers (North, Middle, and South), as well as on the prairies, my opportunities for observation could scarcely have been more favorable.<sup>2</sup>

with an eye to the feathered tribes, will serve to illustrate the scarcity of bird-life in the forest. After expressing my surprise at the scarcity of birds seen under the most favorable circumstances, I add: "Two or three species of Woodpeckers, (only the Red Head, *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, at all common), a few Blue Jays and two or three Wood Pewees (*Contopus virens*), a few families of Chickadees, (*Parus atricapillus*), two Robins, as many Baltimores (*Icterus Baltimore*), and a very few Warbling Vireos, a few Cedar Birds, King Birds, Yellow Birds, (*Chrysomitris tristis*), Swallow-tailed Hawks, and Turkey Buzzards flying over, and a Kingfisher and two species of Sandpipers along the river, comprise all either seen or heard. This is in marked contrast with similar situations at this season in New England, where, instead of silence

almost for hours together, numbers of species would be constantly heard, and many times each day would considerable parties of Warblers, Vireos, Titmice, Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, and other species, varied but harmonious companies, have passed our camp." About twenty species were actually noted during these three days, but only about half a dozen could be considered common, while nearly half were seen but once or twice. On the wild prairies I often noted a similar scarcity — long rides with hardly a bird to notice to relieve the tedium; and generally their feathered inhabitants were mainly of less than half a dozen species.

<sup>1</sup> See remarks on this species beyond.

<sup>2</sup> For this I cannot too fully express the obligations I am under to Dr. C. A. White, Director of the Iowa State Geo-

77. *Circus hudsonius* Vieill. Marsh Hawk. Seen almost daily, flying low and rapidly over the prairies. The only Hawk seen habitually on the open prairie.

78. *Nauclerus furcatus* Vigors. Swallow-tailed Hawk. Common. Often seen in considerable numbers, and generally over or near the timber skirting the streams. At Denison, in the timber of the Boyer River, they were very common and nesting; the nests being placed on horizontal branches, at some distance from the trunk. By the middle of July the young had not flown. With a peculiarly graceful, swallow-like flight this beautiful bird was seen not infrequently skimming over the prairies, singly or two or three in company, eagerly searching for their reptile food.

VULTURIDÆ.

79. *Cathartes aura* Ill.<sup>1</sup> Turkey Buzzard. Common, and generally distributed. On several occasions I saw them collected about the carcass of a dead animal in considerable numbers. At Panora I once saw them congregated in hundreds, attracted by two dead pigs. Frequently observed them resting on the fences and wheat stacks, in very hot days opening their wings to catch the breeze, the very pictures of indolence. In southern Guthrie County is a locality known as "Buzzards' Roost," it is said from the number of these birds that resort there

COLUMBIDÆ.

80. *Zenædura carolinensis* Bon. Mourning Dove. Very abundant, and almost domestic.

MELEAGRIDIDÆ.

81. *Meleagris gallopavo* Linn. Wild Turkey. Said to have been rather common about the groves when the country was first settled, and to exist in small numbers still.

TETRAONIDÆ.

82. *Cupidonia cupido* Bd. Prairie Hen. Generally abundant. This season rather scarce; owing to the extreme wetness of the spring and early summer few young were raised. Rarely any but old birds seen, which were shy and hard to get. Exclusively a prairie bird, as its name indicates. At Boonesboro it was said to have the singular habit,

Bryant has remarked (Proc. Bost. Soc. Nat. Hist. Vol. VII, 107), as well admit twenty, or extend the number almost indefinitely. The species of *Buteo* already admitted by different authors, for temperate North America, numbering twelve to fifteen, is an altogether improbable number, considered in reference to the evidence furnished on this point by what is known of the general distribution of these birds; while in the additional light of the well-known variability of its representative of the Eastern Continent, *Buteo vulgaris*, it becomes quite incredible. Judging from the whole number of undoubted species of this family now known, and their relative distribution in different countries, we have apparently no good reason to expect more than the three or four well-marked ones of this genus, which we certainly have, as enumerated above. Again, the wide range of individual variation, especially in color, which eminently marks all the *Falconidæ*, renders the characters assigned for many of our *Buteos* of little weight.

*C. braziliensis*, of South America, there is a correspondence in their relative distribution in the higher latitudes on each side of the equator which seems to strongly indicate their identity. But, in fact, we are now able to trace both of our North American species across the tropics. In North America the *C. aura* Ill. exceeds the range northwards of *C. atratus* Less. by about twelve degrees of latitude, *C. aura* reaching in summer, in the interior, nearly or quite to the 55th parallel, while *C. atratus* has not been traced above the 42d. At the south *C. aura* extends in summer to the Falkland Islands and the southern extremity of the southern continent, (Lat. 52° to 54° south), while *C. atratus* has not been reported below the 40th or 41st parallel. The smaller size of specimens from Brazil, compared with those of the United States, which has been dwelt on as the chief distinction, is only what we should expect from what seems a general law of size among birds — a diminution with the decrease of latitude and increase of temperature in species having a wide range in latitude, and which hundreds of species, in both hemispheres, exemplify.

<sup>1</sup> While no character has been adduced showing satisfactorily specific diversity between *C. aura* Ill. and *C. atratus* Less., of North America, and their supposed distinct allies, *C. jota* and

135. (327). *Elanoides forficatus* (Linn.). Swallow-tailed Kite.

The Swallow-tailed Kite was formerly a tolerably common summer resident throughout the state, but of recent years it is of infrequent occurrence, though reported by nearly all observers.

Thomas Say observed the species in Pottawattamie county in 1819-20. Prince Maximilian also observed it on the Missouri (Reise, i, 306): May 8, 1833—"Etwas weiter aufwärts tritt Floyd's-River hervor, und an den Floyd's Hügeln zeigen sich einzelne Nadelholz-Bäume, über dene der weisse gabelschwänzige Milan (*Falco furcatus*) in der Luft schwebte." . . . (Ibid. ii, 340) May 11, 1834 (mouth of Little Sioux), "bemerkten in der Luft ein Paar der schönen weiss und schwarzen Milanen, welchen die französischen Abkommlinge am Mississippi la fregata nennen." Audubon noted "a Swallow-tailed Kite" near Council Bluffs in 1843 (Journals, i, 481).

Anderson 1907  
pp 242-243

J. A. Allen (Mem. Bost. Soc., i, 1868, 500) writes: "Common. Often seen in considerable numbers, and generally over or near the timber skirting the streams. At Denison, in the timber of the Boyer River, they were very common and nesting; the nests being placed on horizontal branches, at some distance from the trunk. By the middle of July the young had not flown. With a peculiarly graceful, swallow-like flight this beautiful bird was seen not infrequently skimming over the prairie, singly or two or three in company, eagerly searching for their reptile food." John Krider (Forty Years' Notes, 1879, 10) says: "I have found it very abundant in Iowa, Minnesota and Kansas, where they breed. The first nest I found was at Coon Lake, Iowa. I watched the birds building, and only obtained one egg, which is now in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C." Baird, Brewer and Ridgway (N. A. Birds, iii, 1875, 192) describe an egg taken in Iowa by Krider; and Bendire, in his "Life Histories," figures a type specimen of an egg taken in Blackhawk county, June 3, 1875. Morton E. Peck writes me that it "once bred regularly in Blackhawk and Benton counties, where a number of sets of eggs were taken by George D. Peck, the last in about 1877. At present it rarely if ever appears in the county."

Various observers give the food of this species as consisting chiefly of snakes, frogs and grasshoppers. It has been recorded in Iowa at various dates from April until December, but the larger number of specimens appear to be seen in September.