

White-tailed Kite  
18 Sep 1989  
Otter Creek M., Tama Co., IA  
P. Petersen  
IBL 60:11, 12, 61:84, Petersen 1992

Record Number: 89-26  
Classification: NA

#### DOCUMENTATION

Peter C. Petersen

#### REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:11, 12  
Records Committee: IBL 61:84, 64:70  
Petersen, P. C. 1992. Iowa's first Black-shouldered Kite. IBL 62:25-26.

#### REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION

Tom Kent to Records Committee, 13 Sep 1993

VOTE: 6 A-D, 1 N-A

NA: Does not completely rule out Mississippi Kite.

A-D: Description is brief but adequately covers key points that are distinctive for this species.  
Too bad it didn't stick around.

A-D: I can't find anything in the description to refute the identification. Black on wing from body to bend in wing alone appears diagnostic. Similar gulls eliminated by written description and fact that this bird was pursued by smaller birds - at least I've never seen gulls pursued by smaller birds. Perhaps lending credibility to possibility of vagrancy to upper Midwest is the fact that Wisconsin has three records, including Sept. 9, 1989, and May 1987. (Am. Birds, 44:1, Pg. 93)

A-D: Mississippi Kite was not eliminated. Shape and size could indicate either. At 300+ meters a Mississippi Kite could appear to have a white head and body, but could not have a white tail under any circumstances that I can think of. I do not like to accept a first state record based on a 300+ plus meter view. It is easy to make misjudgements at this range. However, the white tail makes it hard to discount this record.

A-D: Documentation thoroughly describes this species.

A-D: Good description of a surprising bird for Iowa.

A-D: Convincing description - key plumage characters see, although distance not optimal.  
Experienced observer helps.

REVOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: With reservation I will vote with other members. I think a possibility exists of Mississippi Kite. However, the document seems to be acceptable.

A-D: Mississippi Kite is eliminated clearly by the white tail and the black on wing from body to bend in wing.

A-D: While the description was brief, it still covers the main points and confirms the ID. NA states that Mississippi is not ruled out. I would like a little more explanation. Also, I'm a little surprised we're still talking about first state records.

A-D: Why wasn't Mississippi Kite eliminated under similar species? Shape and size could indicate either. At 300+ meters a Mississippi Kite could appear to have a white head and body, but could not have a white tail under any circumstances that I can think of. I do not like to accept a first state record based on a 300+m view. It is easy to make misjudgements at this range. However, the white tail and the experience of this observer makes it hard to discount.

A-D: Mississippi Kite ruled out by description of long white tail which is entirely inconsistent with Mississippi Kite. Mississippi Kite is also dusky and dark in underwings, the description mentioned very light gray underwing. Black leading edge from body to bend of wing on a medium gray overwing completely rules out Mississippi which is dark gray over the whole upper wing surface. Therefore, I do believe Mississippi Kite was ruled out even though not mentioned in the text of the description or in the discussion on similar species elimination.

A-D: I feel that the key marks for a Black-shouldered Kite were observed. The field marks noted would rule out Mississippi Kite although size and shape are similar. It would have been helpful if

the other observer would have documented this bird, too.

A-D: N-A [voter] does not state basis for conclusion. I remain convinced that bird seen well enough for correct ID.

REVOTE (1993): 2 A-D, 5 NA

NA, Distance too great for positive ID.

A-D, I cannot see a reason to reverse the decision of the committee. Description is quite good for Black-shouldered Kite. The distance is great, but if the observer could identify the smaller birds pursuing the kite, there is no reason to suppose he could not also identify this species. It would be hard to refute this on the basis of flight patterns as observer says very little about the flight -- only that it was "graceful" which is true of Black-shouldered Kite as well as kites in general. In addition, I doubt any raptor would stop and hover while it was being harassed by passerines.

NA, Has the Secretary forgotten the virtual war we had regarding a supposed higher standard over first state records? Besides, I don't understand the use of the quote in the context of his comments. Moving along ... this record should have never been accepted, and I am part of the mistake. In view of the fact that this committee turned down a much better record submitted by Johnson, and that this record involved observation of a flying bird at 300 meters with 8x binoculars, considerable doubt is cast on this record. While the description clearly points to Black-shouldered Kite, and its extremely rare occurrence in Iowa is possible, caution should be the guide here.

NA, I have always voted A-D on this record, but never have felt the details were sufficient for a first state record. I would like to know if the observers saw upper wing, and if so was the leading edge black or was the whole shoulder black? How did the observers eliminate male N. Harrier and Mississippi Kite? Is the white tail diagnostic enough to call this bird a Black-shouldered Kite? Pending further review I am voting NA.

A-D, If the description is correct, all similar species are eliminated by white head and tail, dark upper wing coverts, carpal spot below and color. No hovering doesn't bother me if the bird wasn't hunting. This bird is so distinctive that an experienced observer should have little trouble identifying it. The vagrancy pattern is problematic, particularly in fall. Records outside of the gulf coast, where numbers were up, have been west of the Rockies. More easterly vagrants seem to appear in spring. If likelihood becomes our major criterion for acceptance or rejection, however, it will become difficult to ever establish patterns and somewhat meaningless to review records. Although distance and time observed were not optimal, identification of passerines in pursuit indicate a good enough view for identification and I can find no reason other than likelihood to reject.

89-26

13 September 1993

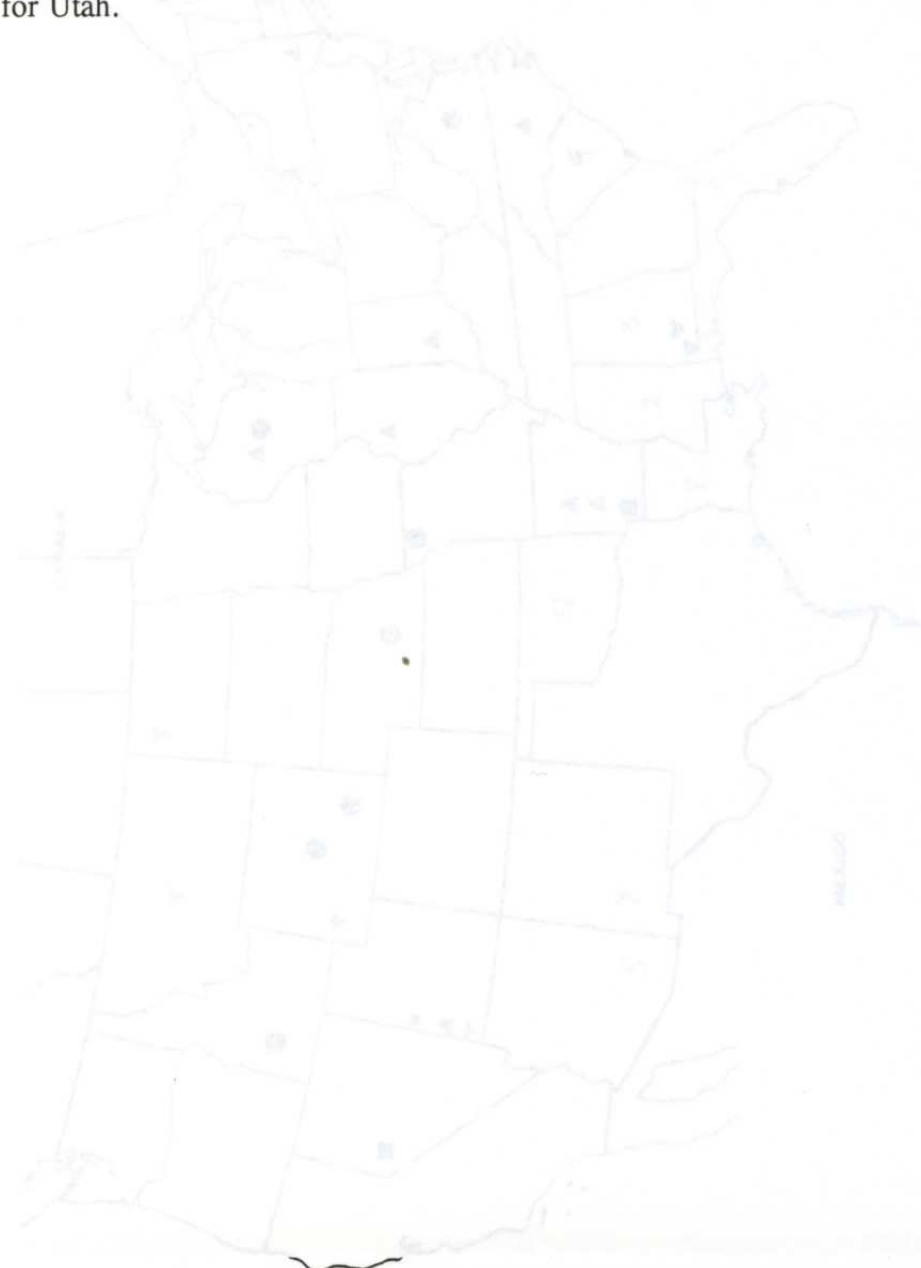
To: IOU Records Committee  
From: Tom Kent  
Re: Request for reconsideration of record

**Record:** 89-26 Black-shouldered Kite

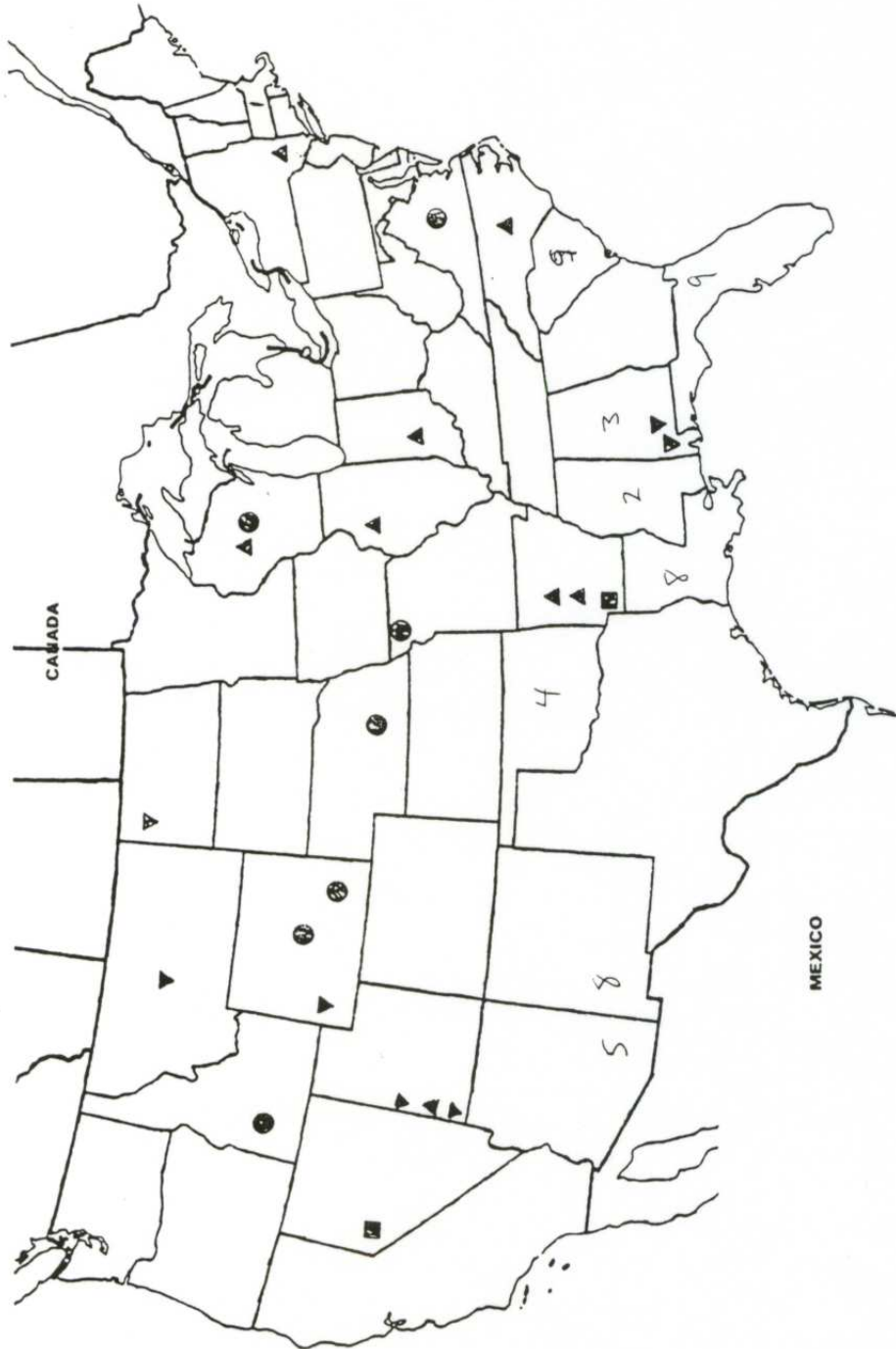
**Reason for request:** Misconception of at least one reviewer, comparison with subsequent review of another record of this species, additional hearsay.

**Comment:** Contrary to the statement of one reviewer that "I'm a little surprised we're still talking about first state records" this species has been a very rare vagrant to the Midwest. The Midwest records have been of birds well seen by many and photographed. The species has expanded its range on the Gulf Coast, into Arizona, and into the Pacific Northwest, but not elsewhere. The behavior is not typical of this species, which usually stays low and hovers, and the distance and viewing time were not optimal. I heard the observer state that he was surprised that the committee accepted this record.

I attach a map of vagrancy records of this species that I made in 1991 with an update for Utah.



B-3 KGE  
→ 1991



spotting of variable density; may be lighter or darker than illustrated." The underwing coverts and body appeared about the same shade to me, and the lighting and distance may have precluded my seeing any streaking. This bird appeared lighter than the two immatures I saw at Dudgeon Lake in 1989 (Conrads et al. 1989).

#### LITERATURE CITED

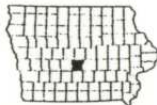
- Clark, W. S., and B. K. Wheeler. 1987. *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston. 198 pp.
- Conrads, D. J., M. Phelps, and T. H. Kent. 1989. Mississippi Kite at Dudgeon Lake. *Iowa Bird Life* 59:118-120.
- Dunne, P., D. Sibley, and C. Sutton. 1988. *Hawks in Flight*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston. 254 pp.

211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

### CALIFORNIA GULL AT SAYLORVILLE RESERVOIR

STEPHEN J. DINSMORE

At 7:45 a.m. on 8 September 1990, I arrived at Oak Grove Beach Recreation Area at Saylorville Reservoir, Polk County. About 60 Ring-billed Gulls were resting on the beach, and among them was a larger, darker-mantled gull. The bird was similar in size to the largest Ring-billed Gulls, but slightly larger than others. I approached closer and noted that, when compared to a Ring-billed Gull, the bird had duller yellow legs, a stouter bill with black and red spots near the tip of the lower mandible, and a darker gray mantle.



From 8:14-9:27 a.m. I was able to study the bird at close range as it fed and rested with the flock of Ring-billed Gulls at nearby Cherry Glen Recreation Area. The bird was slightly larger than most of the Ring-billed Gulls, although one or two of the biggest Ring-billed Gulls were as large as the bird I was studying. Proportionately, the bird was heavier and larger-headed than a Ring-billed Gull. The mantle was dark gray. I estimated the mantle color to be about midway between those of a Ring-billed Gull and a Lesser Black-backed Gull. The wingtips were mostly black with large, white mirrors near the tips of the outer primaries. There was a noticeable white trailing edge to the wing. The head was mostly white with some obvious dark brown streaks on the crown and nape, and a few on the side of the head. Eye color was not seen well, though it appeared dark every time I examined it. The bill was yellow with single red and black spots, somewhat blended together, near the distal end of the lower mandible. The red spot was immediately above and slightly posterior to the black spot. The bill was heavier than the bill of a Ring-billed Gull and had a distinct gonys. The legs were pale gray-green, unlike the bright yellow legs of a Ring-billed Gull. Leg length appeared similar to a Ring-billed Gull. The underparts and tail were white. Based on the plumage, I concluded that the bird was an adult California Gull in basic plumage.

After studying the bird in detail, I contacted other birders. The bird was not relocated until 14 September, despite searching on previous days. I observed the bird several times between 14-23 September and noted the following. The bird was clearly an adult in basic plumage. The dark brown streaks on the crown and nape were

separated from the dark gray mantle by a white collar across the back of the neck. I again studied the size of the bird and the bill structure as compared to nearby Ring-billed Gulls, and confirmed what I had noted earlier.

On 11 October 1990, I located an adult California Gull in basic plumage feeding with Ring-billed Gulls at the north end of Saylorville Reservoir near Jester County Park. This bird had light-brown streaking on the head and nape and appeared noticeably larger and heavier-bodied than the Ring-billed Gulls it associated with. I believe that this may have been a different bird than the individual noted earlier in September.

California Gulls are rare but regular vagrants to the Midwest, with smaller numbers occurring east to the East Coast. *American Birds* lists records for 13 states east of the Mississippi River since 1980. Most records occurred from July to December, with a few of the birds overwintering. Adults were reported most often, though young California Gulls may be missed because of their similarity to other gulls.

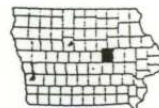
This is the second record of a California Gull in Iowa. The first record occurred on 24 November 1989 at Credit Island, Scott County (Petersen, P. C. 1991. California Gull at Davenport, first accepted Iowa record. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:121-122). It is interesting that a second California Gull appeared in Iowa in fall 1990, a first-winter bird at Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County (Kent, T. H. 1991. First-winter California Gull at Coralville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:123-124). This species is probably more regular in Iowa than these records indicate. California Gulls breed as closed as Waubay and Bitter Lakes in northeastern South Dakota, about 150 miles from northwestern Iowa. In Iowa, this species should be looked for in fall, especially August to November. Based on records from surrounding states, spring records are less likely, but could occur during March to May.

Dept. of Zoology, Box 7617, North Carolina State Univ., Raleigh, NC 27695-7617.

### IOWA'S FIRST BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE

PETER C. PETERSEN

At mid-morning of 18 September 1989, Brian Blevins and I were birding Otter Creek Marsh from the southeastern corner of the pond areas. We noticed a medium-sized raptor flying from south to north about 300 meters west of us. We could see it was long tailed and had pointed wings, but the predominant pale plumage, very light-gray body, and light-gray primaries made it clear it was not a falcon. We both noted the black area on the leading edge of the inner wing from the bend to the body. As we had both seen this bird previously, we said "Black-shouldered Kite" almost simultaneously. The kite was chased by a Red-winged Blackbird which the kite dove at. The blackbird provided a good size comparison. I was using 10 x 40 Zeiss binoculars and Brian had 7 x 35 binoculars. The sky was clear and the sun was to the side and somewhat behind us making for excellent viewing conditions. After the bird flew out of sight, we drove to the north border of the area but we did not encounter it again. Since the species is expanding its range northward, it should be looked for, especially during the migration seasons.



This is the first accepted record of this species for Iowa but there are several records from nearby states. These include a 9-10 May 1987 record from near Galesburg, Knox Co., Illinois, (Bohlen, 1989, *The Birds of Illinois*, Indiana Univ. Press, p. 45)

and a 15-17 May 1987 record for central Wisconsin (same bird?) as well as a 6-27 June 1964 record, also in central Wisconsin (Robbins, 1991, *Wisconsin Birdlife*, Univ. Wisconsin Press, p. 203), and a 14 June 1976 record for Nodaway County in northwestern Missouri (Robbins and Easterla, 1991, *Birds of Missouri*, Univ. Missouri Press, p. 93).

235 McClellan Blvd., Davenport, IA 52803

## I.O.U. BUSINESS

### FALL BUSINESS MEETING

Indianola, Saturday, 14 September 1991, 3:30 -4:30 p.m.

PRESIDING: ANN BARKER

Barker thanked the Rolling Hills Audubon Society for hosting a fine meeting. Members attending their first I.O.U. meeting were asked to stand and introduce themselves.

Minutes for the spring business meeting had been published in *Iowa Bird Life*. It was moved (Bud Gode, seconded by Jacqueline Wacker) to waive reading them and to approve the minutes as published. Motion passed.

Treasurer: Copies of a financial statement for the year to date prepared by Pam Allen (who was unable to attend the meeting) were distributed. There were no questions. The Board of Directors will consider the 1992 budget at its November meeting.

#### Committee Reports

Records: Francis Moore reported that Carl Bendorf has resigned as committee Secretary. The 1989 report and the new official state checklist will be published soon in *Iowa Bird Life*. Work on the 1990 report is in progress.

Publications: The Board reappointed Dave Edwards to a second term.

Library-Historical: The Board reappointed the following to second terms: Tom Kent, Jim Dinsmore, and Hank Zaletel.

Membership: Jim Sinclair was reappointed by the Board to a second term. Also appointed were Ann Johnson, Diane Porter, and Mary Jo Hartogh.

Education: Rick Hollis (Chair), Linda Zaletel, Beth Brown, and Diane Porter were reappointed to the committee. Hollis reported that the Iowa Conservation Education Council has pledged \$500 toward publication of the booklet.

Big Day: Co-chairs Eugene Armstrong and Ray Cummins were reappointed. Awards will be presented at the Banquet.

Breeding Bird Atlas: Carol Thompson (Chair), Bob Cecil, Barb Wilson, John Fleckenstein, and Jim Dinsmore were reappointed. Bob Cecil summarized statistics on blocks that were completed.

Nominating: Barker has appointed a committee composed of Carol Thompson (Chair), Pete Petersen, and Ray Cummins to nominate a slate of candidates for the offices of Secretary, Treasurer, and two Board positions. They will report to the Board this fall, and the slate will run for office at the spring 1992 meeting.

#### Old Business

Upcoming meetings: The spring meeting is planned for Camp Iodiseca near Cedar Rapids, hosted by the Cedar Rapids Audubon Society. Dale Fye and Jim Durban reviewed plans to date. The fall 1992 meeting may be held in northeast Iowa if a host can be found. Bob Cecil is checking into possibly holding the spring 1993 meeting in southeast Iowa. A fall field trip to the Red Rock area, coordinated by Jim Sinclair, is planned for 23 November. Pete Petersen is looking into the possibility of a spring field trip to the prairie chicken booming grounds near Mt. Ayr.

Rick Hollis reported on the I.O.U. traveling display which is on display at the meeting. He and Carol Thompson are in charge of the schedule for the display; members are encouraged to use it to spread the word about the I.O.U. at meetings and events. A round of applause was given for Carol Thompson in appreciation of her work on the project.

#### New Business

Sue Stroyls and Barb Wilson proposed having a Spring Bird Count. This would be an ongoing study whose purpose would be to gather data in a consistent manner on spring migration and resident birds throughout Iowa. Results would be published in *Iowa Bird Life*. The Board of Directors has endorsed the idea, recommending that I.O.U. sponsor the Iowa Spring Bird Count to be held on the Sunday after the Saturday of the Illinois Spring Count. Stroyls presented her proposal and distributed information. It was moved (Hank Zaletel, seconded by Rick Hollis) that the President appoint a committee to plan the project as recommended by the Board. After discussion about its purpose and the date of the count, Zaletel called the question. The motion passed. Stroyls was appointed chair of an ad hoc committee, with other members to be selected later.

Jim Fuller had inquired whether arrangements could be made to obtain entry for members to restricted sites such as power company properties for birding. The Board asked Fuller to make the official inquiries.

Jim Sheib and Jim Fuller described a computer bulletin board service which would allow reception of other hotlines across the country as well as giving us the ability to post the Iowa Birdline. The Board supports further investigation.

The possibility of obtaining an 800 number for the Iowa Birdline was proposed by Fuller and discussed. The Board has asked Fuller to provide further information on cost.

Fuller and Francis Moore reported breaches in dikes at Otter Creek Marsh and Big Marsh, respectively. The Board asked Fuller to write to the D.N.R. encouraging prompt repair of both.

Jim Dinsmore described plans for the American Ornithologists' Union meeting in Ames on 24-27 June 1992. Volunteer help will be needed. I.O.U. members are encouraged to volunteer and to be involved in the meeting.

Rick Hollis announced that Carol Thompson is putting together a directory of local bird clubs. Anyone interested in being listed should contact Hollis or Thompson.

The meeting was adjourned.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Wisconsin Birdlife: Population and Distribution Past & Present**, by Samuel D. Robbins, Jr. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1991, 702 pp., hardcover, 11 1/4" x 8 3/4" x 1 5/8" \$75.00. This fine book is the long-awaited accompaniment to Owen J. Gromme's book of paintings, *Birds of Wisconsin*, published in 1963. *Wisconsin Birdlife* is encyclopedic, benefiting serious amateur bird students, professional ornithologists, and more casual appreciators of neighborhood birdlife.

The heart of the book is Part I, the 501 pages of species accounts. Each account begins with a brief summary of status, habitat, migration dates, breeding data (if any) and a reference to the species portrait in *Birds of Wisconsin* (if any). A several-paragraph discussion of observations, citations of data sources, and comments by the author about frequency of observations and changes in range follow each account.

These paragraphs provide the best reading and information for active birders unfamiliar with Wisconsin birds and birding. For example, a visitor along the Mississippi River near Prairie du Chien in Grant County, Wisconsin near Dubuque might be startled to spot a Great Blue Heron in January. He or she should be startled. However, the discussion points out that the Great Blue Heron is a hardy bird capable of withstanding the rigors of a Wisconsin winter, and a range map shows nine mid-December to late-February records along the Mississippi and St. Croix rivers between 1960 and 1990.

The discussion of the Great Blue Heron also documents the decline of the species in the state, offering theories to explain the decline, but acknowledging none has been proven. Nestling great blues banded in Wisconsin have turned up in Mississippi, Arkansas, Texas, Mexico, Belize, and Costa Rica. One bird was recovered in Cuba. Birders familiar with the Great Blue Heron in Wisconsin but

89-26

DOCUMENTATION FORM  
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

89-26

What species? Black-shouldered Kite - ad. How many? 1

Location? 5.5 E corner Her Creek Marsh, near Chelsea, Ia.

Type of Habitat? rather dry marsh, some wooded margins

When? date(s): Sept. 18, 1989 time: 9:30 to 9:35 AM <sup>West</sup>

Who? your name and address: Peter C. Petersen, 235 McClellan Blvd, Davt <sup>5-89</sup>

Others with you: Brian Blewus

Others before or after you: none to my knowledge

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, undertail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

A kite of peregrine falcon wingspread length was seen in flight for five minutes, pursued by Red-winged Blackbird & C. Flicker. Wings long, pointed, tail long, square & white. Body & head white, underwing very light gray, darker to tips, Overwing gray (med), dark (nearly black) on leading edge from body to bend, Flight very graceful, seemed to have a small, dark spot at bend of wing from below, but this was seen very briefly & from a long range. Bird very trim & slim

Similar species; how eliminated: The only similar raptor would be an Osprey which is much larger, has a black mask, elbow with large black area, mottled gray underwing & out tail & dark on upper surface of wing. Gulls are closer, but wings with dark area at tips of wings on top side, shorter tail, different flight, not pursued by small birds.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about the identification? no  
If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.  
Sun behind observers - distant, at 300m. judged by position of power line. 8x40 & 7x35 binoculars.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen this species many times in Cal & Texas, also on three occasions in July in Costa Rica

References and persons consulted before writing description: none

How long before field notes made? 5 min this form completed? 4 hrs.

Send completed form to Field Reports or CBC editor (address on back cover of Iowa Bird Life).