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NOTES ON A MISSISSIPPI KITE NEST IN CENTRAL  
IOWA  
PHILIP J. WALSH

In the United States, the Mississippi Kite's breeding range includes much of southeastern United States and the southern Great Plains. In the last 50 years there have been numerous sightings outside of its traditional range, and it has been expanding its breeding range northward. Most published maps show the breeding range to extend up the Mississippi River valley into southern Illinois. In the spring of 1991, Fred Crane discovered a pair of Mississippi Kites in the backyard of his residence in Clive. Kites were seen in the same area for the next three summers (Clark 1995), and nesting was suspected but no nest was found or young kites seen. With the discovery in 1995 of a nest in Polk County, the species has apparently made another jump north in its continuing range expansion.



Over a period of about six weeks in summer 1995, I visited the nest site about 25 times. Below, I summarize those observations, including notes about the nest, feeding behavior, and the development of the chick. I also describe several other Mississippi Kite sightings in Des Moines during the summer. At the end of this article is a brief history of the Mississippi Kite in Iowa.

1995 NEST

In the middle of May, two adult kites were found near the Olivet Baptist Church in Windsor Heights, a few hundred yards east of Fred Crane's residence. They were often seen perched in a large tree on the edge of an undeveloped wooded area along a small creek that runs between the church and the Crane residence.

In late May and early June, I stopped by the church several times to observe these sleek and graceful raptors. But by early July, the kites had disappeared. I checked the site several times in July, and never saw kites there. I knew that the kites had been seen in this general area each summer for the past several years, and that nesting had been suspected. In early August, thinking about how the birds had been easy to locate early in the summer and had then disappeared, I wondered if perhaps they had a nest secluded somewhere nearby. On 4 August, I stopped at the church, thinking that if I was lucky perhaps I'd see an immature kite flying over the area. The following is a note I scribbled half an hour later:

1:15 p.m. Pulled into Olivet Baptist Church parking lot; noted adult kite perched in cottonwood. Watched adult kite holding/playing with what appeared to be a frog. Did not seem to be actually eating it. After a few minutes, it flew to a neighboring tree. I approached the tree slowly, scanning the tree with binocs, until I noticed (with naked eye) a leafy nest in a fork. I put the binocs on it, and a baby raptor, all white and very fluffy, seemed to be looking directly at me. I studied it briefly (30 seconds) to be confident it was a baby raptor; I looked briefly for an adult bird but did not see one, then I retreated.

I spent less than five minutes in the parking lot. Aware that this was potentially the first recorded Mississippi Kite nest for the state, and surprised by both the

accessibility and the apparent vulnerability of the chick, I was anxious to confirm the sighting, and at the same time worried about disturbing the nest.

That afternoon I phoned Jane Clark of Clive and told her what I had seen. We met at the church around 6 p.m. that evening. When we arrived, there was an adult kite on the nest, and a chick periodically sticking its head up above the rim of the nest. I noted a yellow cere, black-tipped beak, and a very distinct patch of black skin extending forward from the eye.

## NEST AND NEST SITE

The nest was located in a large hackberry tree over a well-mowed lawn next to the parking lot behind the church. The kites often perched in a cottonwood growing on the bank of a small creek about 150 feet from the nest tree (Figure 1). The nest was perhaps 50 feet up and perhaps 15 feet below the top of the tree. The nest was made of sticks and twigs, with some leaves showing here and there. It was not very large, perhaps 10-12 inches in diameter, and seemed a bit ramshackle. Kite nests are usually saucer-shaped (Ehrlich et al. 1988), though I'd call this particular nest more bowl-shaped. It was located in a small fork in the tree, and seemed well protected from above.



Figure 1. Adult Mississippi Kite perched in cottonwood tree, 26 August 1995. Photograph by Reid Allen

The nest held one chick. Kite clutches usually have one or two eggs, and there is typically only one clutch per year (Ehrlich et al. 1988, Johnsgard 1990). Kites reuse nests from year to year; successful nests are reused more often than unsuccessful ones (Johnsgard 1990). Perhaps the kites will nest at this location again in 1996.

I had thought that if there was a nest in the area, it would have been further back in the woods somewhere; I was surprised by its location in the middle of such a heavily landscaped area. However, Mississippi Kites have been reported nesting in large mature trees over lawns, along busy streets, and in trees in golf courses (Bolen and Flores 1993, Parker and Ogden 1979, Johnsgard 1990).

## FOOD AND FORAGING HABITS

I saw the immature kite being fed by adults on more than 50 occasions. Most of these feedings involved prey that I was unable to identify; on those occasions when I was able to identify the item, cicadas or dragonflies were the typical meal. I also noted butterflies being taken a few times, and, as mentioned above, a frog on one occasion. All of these are typical prey items except the frog (Bolen and Flores 1993).

In the first few days, the typical feeding sequence was something like this: an adult, hawking from the cottonwood tree, swooped out of the tree in pursuit of prey, captured it, and returned to the perch. The bird plucked the wings and (apparently) other inedible parts from the insect, then spent 1-2 minutes carefully studying the surrounding area. Then, the adult left the perch and, with a few quick flaps of its wings, arrived in the nest tree, landing a few feet above the nest. It hopped to the nest, perched on the edge of the nest, holding the prey in its talons, and began tearing portions from the prey and feeding them to the chick. After 2-3 minutes of feeding, the adult returned to its perch in the cottonwood tree.

A common variation, perhaps occurring just as often, involved the second adult. With the chick in the nest and one adult perched in the cottonwood tree, the second adult would fly to the cottonwood with something it had caught, land near the first adult, pass the prey to the first adult, and immediately leave. The first adult would then repeat the rest of the sequence described above, cleaning the prey, scanning the area, and then flying to the nest and feeding the chick. Occasionally, while one adult was already at the nest feeding, the second adult would fly directly into the nest tree and either pass the prey to the adult already there, or alternatively, tear it apart and feed the chick as well, so that the chick had two adults offering food simultaneously.

Newly hatched kites are usually fed food that has been softened in the parent's esophagus and regurgitated. By the time nestlings are 11 days old, they can be fed more solid food and the feeding of regurgitated food stops (Bolen and Flores 1993). I never saw the nestling being fed regurgitated food, suggesting the bird was more than 11 days old by the time the nest was discovered.

One afternoon, as an adult hawked from the cottonwood and the nestling sat quietly in the nest, I watched a small yellow butterfly flutter toward the nest tree. Thirty seconds later the adult swooped out of the cottonwood to within a few feet of the ground near the base of the nest tree, rode its momentum up the other side of the arc, turned and dropped back toward the ground, and then casually returned to the perch. There it carefully plucked the wings from a yellow butterfly and carried the body to the nestling.

As the nestling grew older, the adults spent less time at the nest feeding it. Instead, they would fly in, pass the item to the nestling, and then leave the nestling to tear the food apart on its own. By the time the immature had fledged, it was aggressive about retrieving food from an adult, rushing at the adult and stabbing at the prey the adult held in its beak.

During the time I watched the adults feed the chick, I saw 45 feedings in 517 minutes of observation, an average of 11.5 minutes between feedings. This is amazingly close to the 11 minute feeding interval reported by Bolen and Flores (1993). The longest interval between feedings that I noted was 30 minutes, and the most intense set of feedings that I saw was nine in 35 minutes. In the 15+ hours that I watched kites at this site, I only saw adults eating something themselves twice.

The first time I saw the immature make a serious attempt at hunting was on 3 September, seven days after fledging; it stooped on an insect and missed. On 8 September, 12 days after fledging, the immature glided to the perch in the cottonwood tree carrying what appeared to be a Monarch butterfly. Just after the immature landed, an adult landed next to it. The immature ate the butterfly and, when it finished, the adult handed over prey it had been holding. The adult fed the immature three more times in the next 15 minutes, suggesting that even though the immature was learning to hunt, it was still (at what I guess to be 45 days of age) heavily dependent on the adult for food.

Some lessons must come more slowly than others; on 10 September, the adult passed an insect over to the immature, which immediately tried to gulp down the prey without first de-winging it; the bird quickly pulled the insect back out of its mouth, cleaned it, and then ate.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHICK

When I first found the nest, the chick was completely white and downy. It was very alert, and could easily hold its head up over the rim of the nest. I guessed that it was 1-to-2 weeks old.

On 8 August, four days after finding the nest, I was amazed at how much the chick had changed. When it stretched a wing out, it appeared to be half to three-fourths the length of an adult wing, and the black feather tips were visible. Also, black tail feathers had erupted and the bird had the beginnings of a black band high on its chest.

Eight days later, on 16 August, the chick's head was no longer clean and white, but instead a dirty-white, flecked with dark, and the upperside of the wings were completely covered with dark feathers. The breast was streaked brown and white, the back of the head and neck were a very dark/dirty gray, and the primaries were dark brown, edged with white. The forehead and area above and behind the eye were still white. Some white speckling was visible on the upper-back. The breast was a noticeably different color than the wings--rusty brown vs. dark gray. I also noted that its beak seemed bigger, the cere yellower, the rest of the beak blacker and more well-defined than it had been. When not eating, the chick often preened.

On 19 August I noted that the immature seemed even darker; still pale around the eyes and just above the beak; the top of the head, back of the head, and nape all were very dark. The upper wings were almost black.

On 5 September, I could see that the trailing edge of the upper wing on the immature bird had a thin white edge (where adults have wide white bands). The tail had three distinct white bands, separated by dark bands of equal width.

#### BRANCHING AND FLEDGING

I had been told that eventually the nestling would start to wander around in the tree, hopping from branch-to-branch, as a prelude to fledging. So I wasn't overly surprised on 23 August when the nest was empty and for 10 minutes I could not locate the nestling. Eventually I found it, about 10 feet above the nest, and 20 feet to the side. From that day on, I could never be sure where the bird would be, and often had to search for several minutes before I located it, although it seemed to have several favorite locations in the nest tree, and could usually be found in one of those.

By 26 August the immature was often seen stretching and flapping its wings. On 28 August it was in the cottonwood tree with both adults. I also saw it take some short flights around the parking lot that day. Assuming that it fledged on 27 August, and using a 31 day incubation period and a 34 day fledging period (Ehrlich et. al. 1988), I estimate that the egg was laid on 23 June and hatched on 24 July. This is somewhat late, according to the literature. Mid-May through mid-June, with a late date of 25 June, is the normal egg-laying season (Bolen and Flores 1993).

Mississippi Kites are migrating south by mid-September, with northern birds heading south earlier (Johnsgard 1990). Again, this makes this nest seem late (kites were observed at the nest site up through 13 September). One possible explanation for the late date is that perhaps this was a second nesting attempt. Most sources say kites only lay one clutch of eggs, although some people think they may attempt a

second laying if the first clutch is destroyed early in the season (Bolen and Flores 1993).

One other note concerning this nest's timeline: immature kites are often fed by adults through 60 days of age (Johnsgard 1990). This immature kite wasn't 60 days old until 22 September, nine days after the last date I saw kites at the nest site. If we assume that the birds started their migration on 13 September, either the immature and at least one of the adults traveled together as they left on migration, or this immature lost contact with its parents more than a week earlier than is typical.

#### VOCALIZATIONS

Although I occasionally heard the adults calling (usually while they perched in the cottonwood tree), the chick remained silent through most meals. Perhaps this was because there were no other chicks to compete with it for food, or perhaps kites are just quieter than most birds. In any case, it wasn't until the immature had fledged that it became noticeably vocal. On 6 September, I timed the bird as it called. An adult was hunting nearby, and fed the immature six times in the 60 minutes I watched. During that hour, I periodically counted the fledgling's calls. I heard the fledgling call 44 times in 360 seconds, once every 8.2 seconds.

#### INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER BIRDS

There were several opportunities to watch kites interact with other birds. The adults often seemed to check the nest tree before they landed in it, scanning the area before actually going to the nest. My belief about this behavior was strengthened one afternoon when, with one adult perched in the cottonwood tree, the second adult landed near it, passed it some food, and immediately left. After scanning the area for a minute or two, the adult in the cottonwood left the perch and flew to the west, away from the nest. A minute or so later, I looked up and saw a buteo, circling overhead. After another minute or so, I noticed a kite, circling high in the west. A minute or two later, the buteo flew off out of sight.

On another occasion, as I watched the chick in the nest, it became agitated, jerking its head back and forth and appearing quite nervous. Suddenly a Turkey Vulture flew over the nest tree, followed by several crows. The crows were chasing a large bird I couldn't identify. All the birds flew on by, and a minute later, the chick was back up on the edge of the nest, calmly preening.

On 28 August Jane Clark and I saw the immature being harassed by Blue Jays. The kite's reaction was to vocalize loudly and move regularly. The jay's behavior seemed odd, as Blue Jays had been in the area all summer, and had never been observed harassing adult kites. Why were adults never harassed, while the immature was? Clark noted the similarity between the plumages of immature Mississippi Kites and Peregrine Falcons, and speculated that perhaps the falcon-like plumage of the immature triggered the jay's behavior.

On 29 August, I watched two adult kites circling over the nest site with a buteo. One of the kites swooped at the buteo a few times, and it flew off. Later that morning, adult kites were seen chasing a Red-tailed Hawk; a Broad-winged Hawk cruised through the area at the same time, unmolested by the kites. On 10 September, along 51st Street, I watched an immature Mississippi Kite and an immature Broad-winged Hawk circle together overhead. I also observed adult kites and Broad-winged Hawks in the same air-space over the 51st street neighborhood on several occasions.

## KITES AND HUMANS

The birds seemed remarkably tolerant of humans near the nest site. On most occasions, they seemed to ignore our presence. On one occasion I believed I was clearly intruding on the birds. It was a very hot day (ca. 95 degrees), and I was at the nest site with one other person. Because of the oppressive heat and sun, we stood much closer to the nest tree than usual (trying to get in the shade), within 20 feet or so of the tree's base. The other person's car was parked near the tree as well. For the first 20 minutes that we watched, the chick remained hunkered down in the nest, only occasionally poking its head up over the rim. One adult stood on the rim of the nest, and a second adult perched nearby in the cottonwood tree. After 20 minutes, the other person left. I then moved my scope back 20 or 30 feet, to the other side of the parking lot. Almost as soon as the car left and I moved away, the chick emerged from the nest and began stretching and preening. It seemed obvious to me that we had encroached on the nest.

There are numerous reports of kites attacking humans in defense of their nest (Parker 1988, Bolen and Flores 1993). In some southern cities where kites are common, at times they have reached nuisance status, especially where they have nested near golf courses (golfers apparently don't have much of a sense of humor about Mississippi Kites dive-bombing them).

## OTHER KITES SEEN AT THE NEST SITE

On 26 August, Pam and Reid Allen observed two immature kites, one still at the nest and the other taking brief flights around the area. For 30 minutes, both immature birds and two adults were seen. At one point, the fledgling (as opposed to the bird still in the nest tree) was seen apparently begging for food from one of the adults, which refused to feed it. It is interesting to note that this is the only instance adult kites were seen refusing to feed an immature bird. Eventually, the fledgling flew to the west, leaving two adults and an immature bird still at the site.



Figure 2. Immature Mississippi Kite perched near nest tree, 26 August 1995. Note unbande tail. Photograph by Reid Allen.

Two days later, Jane Clark and I were again at the church watching the kites when we discovered that three adults were present, in addition to one immature bird. We wondered then how many more kites we would find in the coming days, but no more turned up, leaving 26 August as the only day two immature birds were seen, and 28 August as the only day three adults were seen.

At the time, there was speculation that the second immature bird was from the same nest as the bird we had been watching since 4 August. Reviewing my notes, I doubt this scenario. There were times that the nestling crouched in the nest deep enough to make observing it difficult, but the suggestion of there being two chicks in the nest, taking turns crouching or otherwise hiding during the many 50 times I watched one of them being fed, seems improbable. With the appearance of the third adult on 28 August, I believe both of these "foreign" birds were from another nest, perhaps nearby.

An interesting note about the plumage of the second immature bird: photos show the bird to have a solid, dark tail (Figure 2), rather than the banded tail of most juveniles and subadults. This is an uncommon plumage variation in immature kites (Clark and Wheeler 1987), but should be kept in mind when trying to determine the age of a bird being observed.

## KITE SIGHTINGS ELSEWHERE IN DES MOINES

In addition to the observations of kites made at Olivet Baptist Church, I often saw kites over a wooded neighborhood of Des Moines 2.5 miles from the nest site, along 49th and 51st streets, near Greenwood Park. I often wondered whether those kites were the same birds as those nesting in Windsor Heights. The evidence is inconclusive.

On 27 August, I saw a Mississippi Kite along 51st Street that had deep, odd notches in the trailing edge of its wings. I studied it for some time, thinking I could not recall seeing a kite hold its wings in such a manner. Two days later, while watching a kite at Olivet Baptist Church with the same odd wing pattern, Stephen Dinsmore identified the pattern as the result of the bird molting its inner primaries (Figure 3). The next day, 30 August, I again saw a kite over 51st Street with the molt pattern. Over the next few weeks, I repeatedly saw an adult Mississippi Kite with notched wings, the notches receding and being barely noticeable by mid-September. This seems to me good evidence of a single kite ranging over the area from Olivet Baptist Church in Windsor Heights, to 51st Street in Des Moines.



Figure 3. Adult Mississippi Kite showing wing molt, August 1995. Photograph by Phil Walsh.

On 10 September, I was at Olivet Baptist Church for about 30 minutes, during which time the immature was fed nine times by one adult (that still showed traces of recent molt). I left the church and drove directly to 49th Street, where I immediately noted an adult kite directly overhead. This bird showed no discernible evidence of molting. That fact, coupled with the fact I had driven directly to this location from the church, and the adult there was busily engaged in feeding the fledgling, made me confident that the adult at 49th Street was not the same bird I had just seen at the church. But whether it was the second bird from that pair, or a third adult, I can't say.

I observed Mississippi Kites over the 49th/51st Street neighborhood 14 times during the summer; several times I watched an adult disappear into an area of mature oak trees. I tried to locate the bird in the trees, but never could find it.

Also of interest is a kite I saw over 51st Street on 18 August. My notes describe it as having a light gray body, very light colored head, and a gray, banded tail. This is subadult plumage, making this the sixth distinct kite seen in the area in 1995.

On 11 September, I climbed onto the roof of a house on 51st Street and spent 30 minutes watching two kites feed over the area. One of the birds was clearly an adult with wide white bands on the trailing edge of the upper-wing, and the other bird was clearly immature, showing an orange-tinged breast and a barred tail.

### FINAL SIGHTINGS

On 13 September, I saw kites three times: an adult hunting over 49th Street in the morning, an immature in the cottonwood tree at Olivet Church, and an adult or immature, with a very white head, high over 51st Street in early afternoon. Those were the last Mississippi Kites I saw in 1995. I actively looked for kites in the next few days, at the nest site as well as the 51st Street area, but did not see any. I assume they had headed south.

### COMMENTS.

Mississippi Kites often nest colonially, so it would not be unusual to find several kite nests in an area the size of the greenbelt where this nest was found. Because of the species' quiet nature, nesting colonies of kites are easy to overlook, or underestimate (Parker and Ogden 1979).

Two Mississippi Kite nests were found in Ogallala, Nebraska, in August 1994 and one nest in August 1995. All of these nests were discovered by observers watching from a vantage point overlooking an area where several kites were feeding; when a kite caught something and dove into the canopy with its catch, the location was carefully noted and then searched for a nest (Dinsmore and Silcock 1996). This would be an interesting exercise to conduct, in either the Windsor Heights/Clive area, or the 51st Street/Greenwood Park neighborhood.

### BRIEF HISTORY OF MISSISSIPPI KITES IN IOWA

There are no previous reports of Mississippi Kites nesting in Iowa (Dinsmore et al. 1984). Parker and Ogden (1979), believed that sightings of Mississippi Kites during the breeding season were indicative of nesting, and so listed Iowa as a state where kites "nested or probably nested" prior to 1900.

The sightings in 1995 marked the seventh consecutive year Mississippi Kites have been seen in Iowa. The only accepted recent records prior to 1989 are from 1978 (Conrads et al. 1989) and 1980 (Kent 1994).

Recent records for Mississippi Kites in Iowa have been from the following counties: Winneshiek (1978), Fremont (1980), Benton (1989), Johnson (1990), Polk (1991-1995), Black Hawk (1992), Story (1994), Pottawattamie (1994), and Marshall (1994). With the exception of the Pottawattamie and Fremont sightings, all reports have been from central and eastern Iowa. See Appendix A for details.

### SUMMARY

Mississippi Kites were casual or accidental in Iowa prior to 1900 and may have nested here prior to 1900. There are no accepted records in Iowa in this century prior to 1978. Mississippi Kites have been seen in Iowa annually since 1989, sometimes as fly-bys but also as weeks-long or months-long residents. In 1991, kites were seen in Polk County, and for the next three years they were observed regularly there. Nesting was suspected, but not confirmed. Mississippi Kites returned to Polk County in mid-May 1995, and a nest was discovered in early August. This nest produced one fledgling. In addition, a second fledgling and a third adult, were also seen near the nest site. Kites were seen numerous times in Polk County within a few miles of the nest site; it is likely that there were additional nests in the area.

Reid Allen provided photographs for this article. Jane Clark visited the nest site numerous times and provided information, ideas, and guidance. Special thanks go to the congregation and staff of Olivet Baptist Church, who gave birders access to their property throughout spring, summer, and fall of 1995.

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#### APPENDIX A. SUMMARY OF MISSISSIPPI KITE SIGHTINGS IN IOWA, 1978-1995.

1978. One at Cardinal Marsh, Winneshiek County, 29 May (*IBL* 48:72, Kent and Silcock 1985).
1980. Two at Waubonsie State Park, Fremont County, 14 May (*IBL* 50:46, Kent 1994)
1989. Two subadults at Dudgeon Lake, Benton County, from 5 through 9 June (Conrads et al. 1989).
1990. One subadult at Coralville Reservoir in Johnson County on 19 May (Kent 1992).
1991. A pair was seen and documented by many observers in Fred Crane's backyard in Clive in Polk County. They were seen from 22 June through late August. Copulation and other breeding behaviors were noted, but no nest was found (*IBL* 61:114, 62:13).
1992. Three were seen in Clive at the same location as in 1991; two remained throughout June (*IBL* 62:75, 106). There was one other record: a fly-by at Hartman Reserve in Cedar Falls on 16 May (*IBL* 62:75).
1993. One returned to Clive in mid-May and a second bird on 12 June; they were seen carrying nest material on 19, 20 June (*IBL* 63:95).
1994. Mississippi Kites were seen in Clive for the fourth straight year (Clark 1995). Other reports included kites seen on 17 May in Iowa City in Johnson County and 22 May at Peterson Pits in Story County (*IBL* 64:74, Kent 1995). First-year birds were seen over Hitchcock N.A. in Pottawattamie County on 23 September and over Grammer Grove W.A. in Marshall County on 26 September (*IBL* 65:13, Kent 1995).
1995. Mississippi Kites were seen over Olivet Baptist Church on 15 May (Jane Clark, pers. comm.). A pair of adult kites were found at Olivet Baptist Church on 16 May (Pam and Reid Allen, pers. comm., Eloise and Eugene Armstrong, pers. comm.). A nest was found at this location on 4 August. Mississippi Kites were seen in Polk County on numerous occasions throughout the summer. The last reported observation in Polk County was 13 September (*IBL* 66:18).

137 51st St., Des Moines, Iowa 50312

## TWO PIONEER IOWA ORNITHOLOGISTS: CHARLES ALDRICH AND F. E. L. BEAL

JAMES J. DINSMORE

In the late 1800s, ornithology was still a new field of biology. Most recognized leaders in ornithology worked at museums in Europe, and North American workers had little status. Early in 1883, three of America's leading ornithologists saw a need to organize an ornithological society in North America as a way to draw together colleagues at institutions around the country and to gain prestige for work in the New World. By the end of 1883, these three had organized the American Ornithologists' Union (A.O.U.), the first major ornithological society in North America. Since most North American ornithologists lived on the East Coast in the 1800s, I was amazed a few years ago when I saw the names of two Iowans on a list of the founders of the American Ornithologists' Union. Of equal interest to me was the fact that I did not recognize either name as someone who had contributed to early ornithological work in Iowa. This led me to seek further information about these two Iowans, Charles Aldrich and F. E. L. Beal, in an attempt to better understand their role in the study of birds in Iowa in the late 1800s. I have summarized that material below. Most of this information came from obituaries of Aldrich (Brainard 1909, Pammel 1909, Deane 1910) and Beal (McAtee 1917). Information on the founding of the A.O.U. came from a biography of Elliott Coues, one of its founders (Cutright and Brodhead 1981).

### FORMATION OF THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION

The three founders of the A.O.U. were Elliott Coues, an Army medical doctor who, in 1883, was one of the leading ornithologists in North America; William Brewster from Cambridge, Massachusetts, who was associated with Harvard University; and Joel Asaph Allen, also of Cambridge, who likewise was one of the leaders of ornithological work in North America. Interestingly, Allen had spent several months in 1867 in western Iowa and published his observations (Allen 1868), one of the few contributions to Iowa ornithology made by an East Coast ornithologist.

During the winter of 1882-83, Allen, Brewster, and Coues began making plans to form a national ornithological society in North America. One of their most challenging tasks they faced was deciding who to invite. They finally agreed on a carefully selected list of about 50 individuals whom they invited to a meeting in New York City in late September 1883. The three wanted to include all of the "important" people as well as having representation from all parts of the country.

The meeting lasted three days and was a huge success. A constitution was adopted, officers were elected, and several committees were established. Although Allen couldn't attend because of poor health, he was elected President of the organization. Coues was elected to one of two Vice President positions, and Brewster was elected to the council. The A.O.U. was quickly accepted as the leading ornithological society in North America and took a leading role in the study of birds, a role that it has maintained to the present day. Perhaps its most recognized contributions are its journal *The Auk*, now in its 112th year of publication and the periodically revised Check-list of North America birds.

Of the 50 people who were invited to the meeting, 21 actually attended, and they were automatically named Founders of the A.O.U. Charles Aldrich of Webster City

What species? Mississippi Kites How many? 3Location? Olivet Baptist Church - Des Moines areaType of habitat? Church parking lot with large trees and open spaces and creekWhen? date(s): Aug. 22, 1995 time: 8:00 a.m. to 8:40 a.m. approximatelyWho? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: Russ Widner, Phil McFaddenothers before or after you: Many

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.

2 adults and 1 young bird on nest

adults had whitish-gray head with grayish front and back. There was a darker gray on the back. They had ~~darker~~ black tail and wing tip, a hooked black bill, a dark red eye, dark orange feet, and a dark area around the red eye. The adults had whitish-gray secondaries, a square black tail, and black primary tips that extended beyond the tail.

The young bird was in a hackberry tree right next to the parking lot. It had vertical barring - brown and white - on its breast. It had dark brownish back color and a hooked bill. It had brown and white striping over its head. It had a dark eye patch around its eye. The adults flew in and fed the young bird off and on. The young bird practiced flapping its wings at the nest occasionally.

Similar species and how eliminated:

It's quite distinctive. A white-tailed Kite has black shoulders and a white tail.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Mostly cloudy with sun behind us. Adults were estimated at 50 yards and 120 yards away in trees. Young bird at nest was 25-30 yards away. 8x30 Binocs. 22x scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen Miss. Kites in Iowa, Kansas, + Arizona and white-tailed Kites in Texas.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NoneHow long before field notes made? Right away this form completed? NOV. 11, 1995