

Mississippi Kite 1
19 May 1990
Coralville Res., Johnson Co., IA
T. Kent
IBL 60:67, 62:21, Kent 1992

Record Number: 90-05
Classification: A-D

DOCUMENTATION

Thomas H. Kent

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 60:67

Records Committee: IBL 62:21

Kent, T. H. 1992. Mississippi Kite at Coralville Reservoir.
IBL 62:23-24.

VOTE: 7 A-D

A-D: A good complete document well typed and complete. This bird will be reported more as people learn to recognize and identify them.

A-D: A solid description and a reasonable identification.

A-D: Excellent description.

A-D: Nice analysis.

A-D: The detail observed in one minute demonstrates that this birder is familiar with this species. I can not explain the lightness of the underwing coverts except to say that I find wide plumage variation in many raptors. I think jizz, dark tail, and white head make this a Mississippi Kite. The brown undertail coverts and lack of white upper secondaries confirm the documenter's conclusion as a subadult.

A-D: Very good study and elimination of similar species. This record is beyond doubt even though there was such a short sight duration. The description eliminates everything else.

A-D: Good description and details for a Mississippi Kite.

- Laughing Gull:** A bird at L. Manawa on 9-10 Sep (*IBL* 61:20) was wearing a leg band and had escaped from nearby Henry Doorly Zoo in Omaha, apparently overcoming surgery designed to prevent flight (category A-E).
- California Gull:** An adult at Saylorville Res. was documented by many observers from 8 to 23 Sep and 1 to 14 Oct (*IBL* 61:20, Dinsmore 1992). A first-winter bird was at Coralville Res. on 27-28 Oct (*IBL* 61:20, Kent 1991a, 1991c).
- Thayer's Gull:** One first-winter bird was at Red Rock Res. on 21 Nov (*IBL* 61:21).
- Lesser Black-backed Gull:** An adult was at Bettendorf and Lock and Dam 15 on 17-19 Feb (*IBL* 60:49, 52).
- Black-legged Kittiwake:** A very unusual record of an adult bird feeding in a farm field with Ring-billed Gulls on 11 Nov was n. of Ventura (*Jan L. Walter, *IBL* 61:21).
- Ivory Gull:** A first-winter bird delighted many observers and established a first confirmed state record (A-P) at Red Rock Res. from 24 Dec to 1 Jan 1991 (*IBL* 61:53, 57; *IBL* 61 (2):cover) (photo in Knoxville *Journal Express* 5 Jan 1991, Dinsmore 1991).
- Least Flycatcher:** An extraordinarily late bird was studied at Red Rock Res. 16-18 Dec (*Ann M. Johnson, *Tim Schantz, photos, *IBL* 61:49, 50, 58). The identification was based on overall coloration, short primary extension, distinct wing bars, and a sharp "whit" call note.
- Black-billed Magpie:** One was near Sioux City on 29 Dec (*Jerry L. Probst, *IBL* 61:50, 53, 58).
- Yellow Grosbeak:** A bird visiting a feeder near Elkhart from late Nov through 28 Dec was seen by many and documented by no fewer than ten observers (*D. Mosman, *T. Schantz, photos, et al., *IBL* 61:49, 50, 59). Photos also appeared in the Des Moines *Register* and *Bird Watcher's Digest* (Porter 1991). There are few accepted U.S. records outside of some late summer sightings in Arizona. Several observers and other interested persons suggested that natural vagrancy might be possible but others of those consulted, (including Kenn Kaufman, Gary Rosenberg, and Bruce Peterjohn) seemed to feel that this was unlikely or, at least, difficult to determine. Without a clearly established pattern of vagrancy, the origin of this bird is uncertain and it was accepted into category A-E.
- Black-headed Grosbeak:** A male was near Booneville on 30 May (*Eloise Armstrong, *IBL* 61:71).
- Green-tailed Towhee:** A bird was photographed (A-P) (*IBL* 60 (3):cover) and documented at West Des Moines on 22 May into June (*IBL* 60:72, 106, Quinn 1990).
- Summer Tanager:** Photos of a lingering tanager at Pleasant Valley on 2 Dec (*Brian Blevins, *IBL* 61:53, 59) were identified as a Summer Tanager by Gary Rosenberg of Tucson, Arizona.

1990 RECORDS NOT ACCEPTED

- Smew:** A record of bird on the Mississippi River was reviewed but there was no evidence that the bird was in Iowa (*IBL* 60:64, 66).
- Mississippi Kite:** Several brief descriptions did not contain enough detail to eliminate other species (*IBL* 60:67, 101, 102).
- Ferruginous Hawk:** A fly-by was not seen well enough to be conclusive (*IBL* 60:65, 67).
- Merlin:** An early summer report was of a brief observation and American Kestrel could not be eliminated (*IBL* 60:103).
- Black Rail:** A description of a small, dark rail was suggestive of this species but none of the key field marks were seen (chestnut nape, bill size and color, white on back or flanks) (*IBL* 61:16, 19).
- Mew Gull:** A description submitted for a sub-adult bird had features that were also consistent with a Ring-billed Gull (*IBL* 61:16, 20).
- Thayer's Gull:** A record from Keokuk on 6 Nov (*IBL* 61:21) was withdrawn by the observer.
- Iceland Gull:** Analysis of the location indicated this bird was probably in Illinois (*IBL* 60:64, 69).
- American Pipit:** A bird in February was described with insufficient detail to eliminate similar species (*IBL* 60:53).
- Northern Shrike:** A bird in July was almost certainly a Loggerhead Shrike (*IBL* 60:101, 105).
- Black-headed Grosbeak:** A female was reported in late May but a photo showed a bird with only a patch of orange feathers on an otherwise heavily streaked breast and flanks, indicating either a Rose-breasted Grosbeak or a hybrid (*IBL* 60:71).
- Lark Bunting:** A report from western Iowa was suggestive but not conclusive (*IBL* 60:65, 72).
- Smith's Longspur:** A late fall record was suggestive of this species but could have been a Lapland Longspur (*IBL* 61:17, 24).

Purple Finch: A bird visiting a feeder in July would be unprecedented (*IBL* 60:101, 106). The details did not exclude the much more likely House Finch.

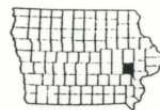
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- Dinsmore, S. J. 1992. California Gull at Saylorville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 62:24-25.
- Kent, T.H., 1991a. A County Big Year. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:65-68.
- Kent, T. H. 1991b. Sharp-tailed Sandpiper at Coralville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:122-123.
- Kent, T. H. 1991c. First-winter California Gull at Coralville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:123-124.
- Kent, T. H. 1992. Mississippi Kite at Coralville Reservoir. *Iowa Bird Life* 62:23-24.
- Porter, D. 1991. Yellow Grosbeak in Iowa. *Bird Watcher's Digest* 13(4):16.
- Quinn, C.A. 1990. Green-tailed Towhee in West Des Moines. *Iowa Bird Life* 60:77-78.
- Silcock, W.R., 1991. Long-billed Curlew in Pottawattamie County. *Iowa Bird Life* 61:120-121.

845 Cypress Ct., Iowa City, IA 52245

MISSISSIPPI KITE AT CORALVILLE RESERVOIR

THOMAS H. KENT



On 19 May 1990, I was watching shorebirds at the Babcock Access at the Coralville Reservoir, Johnson County, Iowa when the shorebirds suddenly flushed and I looked up and saw a raptor. It was hard to judge the bird's size; perhaps it was as large as a Northern Harrier or Peregrine Falcon. It had long, pointed wings that were rather broad, but not as broad as a buteo. Belly, breast, and head appeared white with slight dark line through the eye. The head was small. The underwing linings were white and the flight feathers were dark gray, but the dividing line between white and gray was not distinct. The upper wings and back appeared all gray to me. The tail was thin at the base and flared to a square tip. The upper tail surface was browner than the wings and the under tail appeared dark. The bird glided and sailed as it circled and moved across the reservoir and out of sight. The bird was moving northwest and then north with a 25-mile-per-hour southwest wind.

The pointed wings indicated to me that the bird was a kite or falcon. The gliding rather than flapping or hovering flight suggested a kite rather than a falcon. The white body and head also excluded any of the falcons. The lack of a white rump and the flight pattern excluded Northern Harrier from consideration. White-tailed Kite has a white tail and black shoulder. The lack of white patches in the secondaries and the brown tail fit the description of a subadult Mississippi Kite. I looked for bands in the tail, but I saw none. Failure to see them could be due to lighting or distance, but according to Clark and Wheeler (1987), "A few immatures have solid, unbanded dark brown tails." The prominent light and dark underwing puzzled me, but Dunne et al. (1988) say, "Immature has body and underwing coverts buffy, with dark streaking and

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

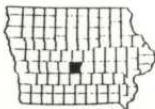
- Clark, W. S., and B. K. Wheeler. 1987. *A Field Guide to Hawks of North America*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston. 198 pp.
Conrads, D. J., M. Phelps, and T. H. Kent. 1989. Mississippi Kite at Dudgeon Lake. *Iowa Bird Life* 59:118-120.
Dunne, P., D. Sibley, and C. Sutton. 1988. *Hawks in Flight*. Houghton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

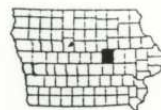
Dept. of Zoology, Box 7617, North Carolina State Univ., Raleigh, NC 27695-7617.

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)



90-05

DOCUMENTATION OF EXTRAORDINARY BIRD SIGHTING

Mississippi Kite, 1 subadult, 19 May 1990, Coralville Reservoir, Babcock Access, Johnson Co., IA

Observer: Thomas H. Kent, 211 Richards St., Iowa City, IA 52246

Other observers: none

Time: 1:35 to 1:36 p.m.

Habitat: wide part of reservoir with open mud flats

Description: "Shorebirds flushed, and I looked up and saw a raptor flying by.

It was hard to judge the bird's size--perhaps as large as a Northern Harrier or Peregrine Falcon. It had long pointed wings, rather broad, but not as broad as a buteo. Belly, breast, and head appeared white with slight line through eye. Head relatively small. The underwing linings were white; the flight feathers were dark gray. The dividing line between the light and dark was not sharp. The upper wings and back appeared all gray to me. The tail was thin at the base and flared to a square tip. From above the tail appeared browner than the wings. The under part of the tail appeared dark. The bird glided and sailed, circling as it flew out of sight across the reservoir. The wind was SW at about 25 m.p.h. The bird was moving NW and then N."

Behavior: The bird did not have the direct flapping wing beat of a falcon. It did not hover.

Conditions: The sky was cloudy and I was looking north. I estimated the distance at about 100 yards. Used 10x binoculars.

Similar species: The pointed wings indicate a kite or falcon. The gliding flight was that of a kite not a falcon. The white body and head also eliminates all falcons. The lack of white rump as well as the flight pattern eliminate Northern Harrier. Swallow-tailed Kite would have a forked tail and different flight pattern. Black-shouldered Kite has a white tail and black shoulder. The lack of white patches in the secondaries and brownish tail indicate a subadult (first year bird). I looked for bands in the tail, but could not appreciate them. Failure to see bands could be due to the lighting and distance or, as noted by Clark and Wheeler, to the fact that "A few immatures have solid, unbanded dark brown tails." The prominent light and dark underwing puzzled me, but Dunne says that "Immature has body and underwing coverts buffy, with dark streaking and spotting of variable density; may be lighter or darker than illustrated." The underwing coverts and body appeared about the same shade to me. The lighting and distance may have precluded my appreciating any streaking. This bird appeared lighter than the bird I saw at Dudgeon Lake last year, especially the underwing coverts. The profile and flight characteristics allowed me to immediately recognize the bird as a Mississippi Kite.

Previous experience: I studied a subadult at Dudgeon Lake in June 1989.

Previously I had seen this species in Kansas and Arizona. I saw many in Texas this spring.

References/time used: None before dictating description. I use The NG Guide and Clark and Wheeler after dictating and looked at Peterson, Dunne, and Palmer after returning home.

Time of notes/typed: 5 min., 2 hours.

