

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 1000 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.

