

Mississippi Kite

22 Jun 1991

Clive, Polk Co., IA

*Cecil,*Johnson,*Fuller,*M.Proescholdt

IBL 61(3) cover, 61:114, 62:13, 70

Record Number: 91-21

Classification: A-P

DOCUMENTATIONS

Robert Cecil, 22, 29 Jun, 1315 41st St., Des Moines, IA 50311

Ann Johnson, 23 Jun, 532, 120th Ave., Norwalk, IA 50211

Jim Fuller, 23, 28 Jun, 6 Longview Knoll, Iowa City, IA 52240

Mark Proescholdt, 2 Jul, Box 65, Liscomb, IA 50148

[Barbara L. Wilson, 21 Jul], RR 1, Box 41, Hastings, IA 51540

PHOTOGRAPPH

Reid Allen, July 1991, P-0316 [cover photo IBL 61(3) used for 2nd review]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 61:114, 62:13

Photograph: IBL: 61(3) cover (P-0316)

Records Committee: IBL 62:70

VOTE: 7-A-D

A-D, A beautiful pair of birds found an excellent home at a wonderful couple. These people were excellent hosts. I fully expected nesting to take place but only a token effort seemed to be made.

A-D, Excellent documentations by multiple observers.

A-D, Excellent description by Johnson and Fuller.

A-D, No doubt about this pair of Mississippi Kites.

A-D, Did any one take photos?

A-D, (were they photographed?) Documentations clearly describe two Mississippi Kites and eliminate all other possibilities.

A-D, Good details and good documentations.

REVOTE at meeting of 11 Apr 1992 after viewing photo on cover of Iowa Bird Life: 7 A-P

What species? Mississippi Kite How many? 2Location? Ann and Fred Crane's home - Clive - (Polk Co.)Type of habitat? Open back yard with oak trees along sidesWhen? date(s): July 2, 1991 time: 6:09 a.m. to 7:30 a.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscumb, Iowaothers with you: Beth Proescholdt, Ann and Fred Craneothers before or after you: Jim Dinsmore, Armstrongs, Beth Brown

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.

We got to the Cranes' home at 6:05 a.m. and sat down and one of the adults and then the other flew into the oak trees and started lots of preening. These Kites had grayish-white heads, very light grayish on the entire underneath body, black primaries, and black tails on both the top and bottom sides. They had dark eye sockets area, yellow legs, hooked bills, and light grayish secondaries seen in flight. The wings were just beyond the tail tip on one perched bird. They had very dark grayish to blackish shoulder areas. One bird showed a grayish bill. Both birds had a few white blotches on their backs like one inch ovals. They had light, graceful flight as they flew around a bit. I saw a notched tail once on one when it flew. They had long, pointed wings in flight. One bird had branches in its bill 3 different times.

Similar species and how eliminated:

Nothing quite like a Mississippi Kite. A Black-Shouldered Kite has a white tail and white body underneath.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? No

If yes, explain:

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

Sunny and clear, birds in shadows mostly with sun at our side; 30-35 yards away at closest to 80-90 yards away - estimated; Real good looks; 8X30 Binocs and 22x scope.

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Have seen Miss. Kites in Kansas, Arizona, and at Dudgeon Lake - (Benton Co. Iowa)

References and persons consulted before writing description:

Robbins' Birds of North America

How long before field notes made? while viewing this form completed? July 5, 1991

91-21

DOCUMENTATION FORM
Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

Species: Mississippi Kite - Two birds primarily in adult plumage

Location: Clive, Polk Co., Iowa

Habitat: Wooded residential area with large oak trees

Date: 23 June 1991

Time: 14:30 to 17:00

Name and Address: Ann Johnson, 532 120th Avenue, Norwalk, Iowa 50211

Other observers: Fred & Anne Crane, Tim Schantz, Dennis & Cecile Thompson, Bob Cecil, Jim Fuller, Sue Spieker, many others at other times

Description of bird: These medium-sized raptors were approximately small crow-sized. The description holds for both birds except as noted below. The head and underparts were a light, pearly gray. The vent was even a bit lighter, looking almost white. The face had a black, narrow stripe on it from the bill to just behind the eye. It was not much wider than the eye itself. The eye looked dark. The small, blue-gray bill was deeply hooked. The bird's head appeared much like a shrike. At the nape the feathering shaded into a darker, slate-gray on the back, rump and wing coverts. The primaries were much darker, nearly black, and at some angles I could see a rufous wash to the inner primaries. The primaries extended beyond the tail when the birds were perched. In flight the short outer primary was very visible. The secondaries were white, making a wide white secondary bar which was very distinctive when the bird was in flight. The underside of the wing was more difficult to observe because of light conditions, but there was some contrast between the lighter wing linings and darker flight feathers. The tail was the same color as the primaries, nearly black, and had a slight notch. The notch was more noticeable when the bird was perched as it was fairly shallow or non-existent when in flight. The underside of the tail feathers showed broad black centers with narrow white edging. The only difference noted in plumage of the two birds was on the breast and belly. The male still had some darker feather edgings, creating a slight horizontal barring pattern or in some areas almost a faint checkered appearance, no doubt remnants of his sub-adult plumage. The female did not show this pattern, but when she turned, white blotches, also remnants of sub-adult plumage, were observed in the area of the upper wing coverts. The smallish feet appeared to be gray on top with a bit more yellow on the bottom.

During the two+ hours I observed these birds, the female never left her perch on a dead branch of a neighbor's apple tree. The male was perched in an oak approximately 200 feet away from her. He would periodically fly out, circle, catch an insect, and go back to his perch to eat it, much as a flycatcher would behave. He was usually gone for only a short period of time and for the most part returned to the same tree. One time when he left, he flew to the female and mounted her. Copulation appeared to be successful as opposed to the two previous attempts the Cranes had observed earlier in the day. They said that on the first attempt the female was somewhat on her side and on the second attempt her tail seemed to get in the way. I assume from the mating attempts and the residual sub-adult plumage characteristics, this is probably a first breeding attempt for this pair. With a time frame of 65 days from the beginning of incubation to

fledging, it would appear to be doubtful that this would be successful nesting for a species that migrates somewhat early.

Similar species and how eliminated: The pointed wings on these birds indicated either a falcon or a kite. The lack of any facial pattern such as hoods or whisker marks and the basically unmarked underparts would eliminate the falcons. Tail shape eliminates the Swallow-tailed Kite and the black tail eliminates the Black-shouldered Kite. Northern Harrier could be considered a possibility, but the distinct black tail, black primaries, and white secondaries eliminate it also.

Did anyone disagree or have reservations about identification? No

Viewing conditions (lighting, distance, optics): The sky was overcast. The male was observed at a distance of 75 feet and the female was about 150 feet away (readings taken from scope). Both birds were observed through 7x26 binoculars and 15-60x scope at various settings.

Previous experience with species and similar ones: I have observed a number of Mississippi Kites and other similar raptors. The length of time I had with these birds allowed better detail observations than any others.

References and persons consulted before writing description: NGS Field Guide, discussion with other observers

How long before field notes made? Dictated at time of observation How long before this form completed? Upon return home

DOCUMENTATION OF RARE BIRD

SPECIES: Mississippi Kite (two adults)

OBSERVER: Jim Fuller, 6 NE Longview Knoll, Iowa City, Iowa, 52240
Jane Fuller, 701 Oaknoll, #221, Iowa City, Iowa, 52246

OTHER OBSERVERS: MOB. While I was there Bob Cecil, Ann Johnson, Sue Spieker, and the Fred Cranes, who reported the birds.

LOCATION: In backyards behind the 7600 block of Harbach Blvd. in Clive, Polk County.

DATE: June 23, 1991 from 4:08-4:51 PM.

BACKGROUND: Mr Fred Crane reported to the Iowa Birdline that a pair of Mississippi Kites had been in his and neighbor's back yards in Clive the previous day and today. They had been observed carrying sticks, one bird feeding another, and copulating. We arrived later that afternoon, and along with several other birders, neighbors, and the Cranes, watched the two birds with binoculars and telescope for about 45 minutes. Except for a brief flight twice by one of the birds, they both remained perched the entire time.

DESCRIPTION: General size and shape. The birds appeared to be crow size or a little smaller, They were more streamlined than a crow, had long wings and tail, and a small head. They were generally three shades of gray.....light gray-white on the head and underparts, dark gray on the back and wings, and almost black on the tail. The folded wings were slightly longer, less than an inch, than the tail.

Head: The head was relatively small, rounded, and was a light pearl gray color. On the nape, the light color was not sharply demarcated from the dark gray of the back. The eye was dark, and despite looking in the telescope, no red was seen. It was surrounded by a blackish area. The bill was short, and the upper mandible was larger and a darker gray than the lower, and had a hook at the end that extended well beyond the lower. The bill also appeared to be a lighter color at its base.

Back: The back was a dark gray, and uniform in color.

Wings: The folded wings were also a dark gray, but exhibited a very noticeable light patch on the secondaries.

Tail: The tail was quite dark gray, almost black, was long, and had a slight notch.

Underparts: The belly was a light gray, but not quite as light as the head. One of the birds showed a very subtle barring on the breast. The vent was quite light, about the same shade of gray as the head. The feet were hard to see, but appeared to be a yellowish color.

Flight: During the two brief flights of one of the birds, I noticed long and pointed wings, like those of a falcon. The light secondaries which were seen on the sitting bird were evident as light wing patches on the inner part of the trailing edge of the upper wing. No reddish areas were noted on the wings. The tail looked quite dark, both above and below. The bird mostly glided during the flight.

No vocalizations were heard.

SIMILAR SPECIES: This bird can be separated from any falcon due to black and notched tail, lightness of head, and light wing patches. The male northern harrier has a gray tail and head, does not show wing patches, and has a white rump patch, all of which differ from this bird. The swallow tailed kite is much larger, with a very different shaped tail, and black shouldered kite has black on the shoulder, and does not have an all dark tail.

VIEWING CONDITIONS & OPTICS: Overcast day, late afternoon. The viewing conditions were excellent. Both birds sat still on exposed perches, allowing unlimited viewing time with 20X telescope and Swift Audubon 8.5X44 binoculars. Viewing distance was approximately 100 feet for both birds. Distance during the brief flights was also about 100 feet.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE: I have seen these birds several times in the west (LaMar, Colorado and Dudleyville, Arizona) and saw the two sub adult birds near Vinton two years ago. However, I have never had this good a view of adults.

REFERENCES and FIELD NOTES: No references were used until after the birds were viewed, and then the National Geographic Guide was consulted. Field notes were written down in the car on the drive home, and this report was typed the following day.

Additional Observations from 28 June, 1991

Time: 2:15-2:30PM

Weather: Sunny & Hot

Optical Equipment: Bird sitting in tree: KOWA TSN-4 telescope with 20-60 zoom lens. Flying bird: 8.5 X 44 Swift Audubon binoculars.

Description: One Mississippi Kite was observed for about 15 minutes. It was first sitting in an oak tree, approximately 100 feet away. It then took off and flew, soaring very high, and then came back down, and landed on the same perch. It was flying for about 12 minutes. During the flight, despite the fact that the bird got very high, the all dark tail, and the lighter head could always be seen. It could also be seen that the outermost primary was shorter in length than the second primary on both wings. The bird used the wind and thermals, much like a turkey vulture, wheeling and gliding, and almost never flapping its wings. It went into some very fast stoops when it was coming down. Several times, the wings were so swept back, that they were about as far back as the tail, and the bird looked like a small case letter "m".

While it was sitting, I looked through the scope, hoping to see a red eye, but could never see a red color, no matter how high the power of the telescope was set.

91-21
not reviewed

Mississippi Kite

1 bird, 7660 Harbach, Clive, Iowa, near Des Moines. 21 July 1991
Seen with Ross Silcock and Tanya Bray.

Description: "A raptor so short-billed it has an almost parrot-like shape. Head light gray. Darker line from t-bill to eye. Back dark gray. Wing coverts at tips lighter. Primaries jet black and very long. Primaries cover tail at rest. In flight, a colvely graceful shape. Secondaries light, primaries dark and probably all of wing black from the wrist." (quoting notes take immediately after the sighting.)

Similar species: Nothing that belongs here.

Sky overcast and drizzly. We saw the bird for couple of minutes, as it perched, flew, and perched again. Could have watched it longer, but it was wet. 8x binoculars.

Notes written immediately after the sightings. No books used then or since. We all agreed about the identification. (We were chasing a stake-out bird) I've seen a few Mississippi Kites, but the rankest beginner could have identified this cooperative and obvious bird.

Barbara L. Wilson
Rt. 1, Box 41
Hastings, Iowa 51540
10 November 1991

DOCUMENTATION FORM
For Extraordinary Bird Sightings in Iowa

91-21

What species? Mississippi Kite How many? 2

Location? Suburban Des Moines, Polk County, Iowa

Type of Habitat? Wooded residential

When? date(s): June 22 and 29, 1991 time: 3:50 to 4:10 PM (22nd)

Who? your name and address: Robert Cecil 1315 41st St. Des Moines, IA 50311

Others with you: John Cecil on the 29th

Others before or after you: about everyone

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.

On the 22nd, I observed a pair of crow-sized raptors sitting in nearby trees. Copying from field notes made at the time, I observed the following:

--Pearly gray breast with darker, slate gray wings.

--Dark through eye

--Head lighter than body - nearly white.

--Bill quite small

--One appeared to have some white in secondaries, but this was difficult to see.

--While at rest, wings extended about one inch past tail.

--Tail black.

Birds sat very upright - seemed relatively tame and unconcerned about our presence.

On the 29th, I was able to see the red eye - this was not particularly conspicuous. Also, when the bird raised its wings, I was able to see the white secondaries. At no time did I see either bird fly.

Similar species; how eliminated: White-tailed kite has white tail, black shoulder patches.

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

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), optical equipment.
150' with Ann Johnson's telescope (KOWA?, I forgot)

Previous experience with species and similar ones: Have seen Mississippi, Swallow-tailed, and White-tailed Kites.

References and persons consulted before writing description: None

How long before field notes made? at time this form completed? 48 hours.

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