

171-01-1991

Porc

MISSISSIPPI KITE, Erie County, PA

Jean and Jim Stull

March 27, 1991: unseasonably warm (high of 78° at 2 p.m.); overcast.

We had been watching birds since about 11 a.m.--mostly Turkey Vultures and crows, but including at least 12 other species, moving from southwest to northeast on strong, gusty southwest winds located about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile south of the Lake Erie shoreline. Our vantage point was in Springfield Township along State Line Road just east of the Ohio border in extreme northwestern Pennsylvania. By 3 p.m. we had tallied more than 650 birds including Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Rough-legged, Cooper's, and Sharp-shinned Hawks, kestrels, harriers, a Merlin, and a goshawk. A nice adult Bald Eagle had just flown over us when several more TVs appeared over the horizon. With them Jim spotted "something different". I saw it immediately and we watched as it moved closer and skimmed quickly along almost directly overhead. "It's a kite!" Those were my words but neither of us said anything else as it moved eastward with the TVs and disappeared. Rather than going for the books immediately as we were tempted to do, we first described exactly what we had seen to each other: (I should add here that we have seen all of the five North American kites--the first, an Everglades (now Snail) Kite in Florida in 1954, the last, a Hook-billed in Texas in 1986.)

1. Typical shape of most kites: slim body; long, slim tail; pointed wings held flat; effortless flight. (Most of the birds that day were riding the winds fairly low, needing little effort to move across our scope of vision.)

2. Smaller than a Peregrine, larger than a Merlin.
3. Long, slim, completely dark, straight or slightly notched tail contrasting with gray unmarked underbody and head. (The bird did not flare its tail at any time as we watched it.)
4. Pointed wings with dark tips.

Although all of the illustrations of adult Mississippi Kite we found in a subsequent search of the literature showed (from beneath) a value gradation from dark to light from wing tips to body, this bird showed a fairly sharp contrast between the dark and light--the primaries being darkest. We never saw the upper surface. We are aware that this is not only an unusual sighting (only the third Western Pennsylvania record), but is also quite early. However, all pertinent characteristics were present and accounted for. The dark unmarked tail, particularly, confirmed our identification of an adult Mississippi Kite. It turned out to be almost the last bird of the day, with only five more kestrels to appear by 4 p.m.

Jean Stull
661 Benson Rd.
Waterford, PA 16441

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation - Round # of

Species: **Mississippi Kite**

Date of Sighting: **March 27, 1991**

Observer(s): **Jean & Jim Stull**

Date of Submission: **1991**

Submitted by: **Jean & Jim Stull**

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV	Class V		
					A	B	C
E. Kwater			X				
B. Haas			X				
F. Haas			X				
R. Leberman			X				
G. McWilliams			X	Stull			
S. Santner			X				
P. Schwalbe			X				
TOTALS			7				
DECISION			X				

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):

B. Haas

Date:

11-6-91