

PENNSYLVANIA ORNITHOLOGICAL RECORDS COMMITTEE  
210 Welcome Ave. Norwood, PA 19074

31 January 2002

Sheryl and Karl Johnson  
453 Duck Pond Lane  
Haverford, PA 19041

Dear Sheryl and Karl,

Thank you for submitting documentation on the Mississippi Kite at Haverford College on 13 May 2000. After careful review, the Committee regrets that it has voted not to accept the record.

The Committee's opinions were split, and the balloting went two rounds before a final decision of four in favor of accepting the record and three not in favor. Our bylaws require a 6-1 or 7-0 vote for acceptance.

Those who voted against accepting it were primarily concerned that Merlin had not been completely eliminated.

We emphasize that non-acceptance does not imply that the bird was not a Mississippi Kite (indeed a simple majority felt that it was), but rather that the other Committee members believed the documentation does not support the identification conclusively.

We hope that this will not discourage you from submitting reports on any future rarities, and we appreciate your excellent documentation in this case.

Sincerely,



For the Committee:  
Paul Hess, Chairman

Record No. 171-01-2000

171-01-2000

**Mississippi Kite**  
(*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

Date: 13 May 2000

Time: 6:45 PM

Location: Haverford College, Haverford Twp., Delaware Co., PA

Duration of observation: less than five minutes.

Weather: partly cloudy, with thunderstorms building; temperatures in the upper 70's F.

Optics: 10 X 42 binoculars

Narrative: While sitting on a bench at the campus playground, my husband called out: "Is that a crow? No." As soon as he sighted the bird, I raised my binoculars then jumped up for a better look as the bird was fast approaching. My first thought was "falcon," but then I realized the bird was entirely pale gray and so my next thought was "harrier." It came nearly directly overhead but was quickly obscured by trees. At that point my husband exclaimed "kite" and I, having decided it was definitely not a harrier, took off for the central green where I could get a better look. Though I didn't have to run far, the bird was already across the green when I reached my vantage point. The bird banked and then turned to fly a short ways back towards me before banking again and then flying away over Barclay, a large dorm. By the time I ran across the green and behind the dorm, the bird was nowhere in sight. A single Common Nighthawk flew by traveling in the same general direction. The kite was traveling NNE. Heavy thunderstorms began later in the evening and moved west to east.

Transcribed from notes taken less than 30 minutes after viewing the bird:

General appearance: A crow-sized but long winged, long tailed, pale gray bird.

Head: Light gray with no apparent or visible markings either above, below or on the side of the face.

Upperparts were never visible.

Underparts: uniform light gray.

Wings: Long, gray and tapered to a point; slightly darker gray in the primaries. (No dark tips noted; shading was gradual.)

Tail: Very light bands on an otherwise light gray tail. White barring was distinct when the bird banked. Tail was slightly broader at the tip but otherwise narrow and squarish.

Manner of flight: The bird flapped nearly the entire time except for perhaps one short glide and when it banked. The entire wing was involved in a stiff, long-winged flap (not something quick and snappy or heavy and labored). Flight was steady and powerful and faster than I would have predicted based on observations of other raptors. (I looked for the bird behind where it actually

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was; that is, upon reaching the green I looked back and sideways, but the bird was already way ahead along its flight path.)

Separation from other species: The bird was not a Peregrine Falcon because the body was gray, as was the entire head which had no other markings. The initial thought of "falcon" was due to the long, pointy-winged appearance. The thin, long wings rule out male Northern Harrier. Harriers are chunkier with broader wings. This bird was also smaller than a harrier. Furthermore, wing beats of harriers do not resemble the stiff flap of this bird. In addition, though pale gray, no contrasting dark tips to primaries or secondaries were observed. Distinctive white barring on the tail, clearly visible, identify this bird as a subadult Mississippi Kite.

Experience with this species: None. Neither I, nor Karl, have seen a Mississippi Kite. (Nick Pulcinella and I, however, did have a probable Mississippi Kite in Chadds Ford on May 17, 1997. That bird, however, was too far for any identifying field marks to be seen. While preparing this report I checked records and found the only other Mississippi Kite reported from Delaware County, PA was seen by Jim Lockyer over Media on May 14, 1994.) Karl's call of "kite" was a result of our limited experience with kites in AZ. Both of us have seen and identified many other raptors in the Northeast and could easily rule all of those out based on the distinctive silhouette and flight style. Karl has been watching birds for 13 years and is best at spotting. I have been watching birds for over 25 years and can generally identify anything that passes through the Northeast.

May 14, 2000  
Sheryl and Karl Johnson  
453 Duck Pond Lane  
Haverford, PA 19041  
sbjohnso@haverford.edu  
(610) 649-4621

## Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

### Voting Ballot - Round One

Species: Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

Date of Sighting: 13 May 2000 to 13 May 2000

Location: HAVERFORD COLLEGE

County: DELAWARE

Observer(s): Sheryl Johnson

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Sheryl Johnson

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead				X				
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes			X					
B. Reid				X				
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			4	2	1			
DECISION								

Comments: 4/3      2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary):

Date:

**Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee**

**Tabulation Form - Round Two**

Species: Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

Date of Sighting: 13 May 2000 to 13 May 2000

Location: HAVERFORD COLLEGE

County: DELAWARE

Observer(s): Sheryl Johnson

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Sheryl Johnson

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

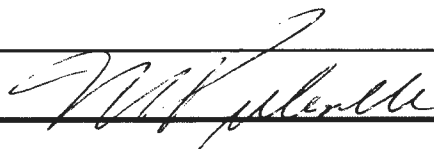
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead				X				
D. Couchman			X					
P. Hess					X			
R. Ickes			X					
B. Reid					X			
P. Rodewald			X					
M. Sharp			X					
TOTALS			4	1	2			
DECISION					X			

Comments: 4/3

Signature (Secretary):



Date: 11/4/01