

171-03-2004

Mississippi Kite
September 20, 2004

On Wednesday, September 20, 2004, I was in the counter's pit at North Lookout with Greg George. Relatively speaking, it was a slow day and winds were light out of the north. A lot of the birds were on the south side of the ridge and this one was no exception. I would probably not have seen it had Greg not pointed it out over Owl's Head. When I got my binoculars (Brunton Epoch's 10.5 X 42) on it, I almost immediately thought it was a kite but, in all honesty, didn't verbalize that thought. I was looking at a bird circling around in a light thermal whose wings were held in a slight dihedral. It wasn't a northern harrier - it had no white rump and it wasn't big enough overall for a harrier. A harrier's wings and its tail are longer in proportion to its body. A harrier's flight is buoyant but not as buoyant as is that of a Mississippi kite, a bird that always seems to me to be more riding up and down on the wind currents than using those currents to steady its buoyant flight. I'm not sure that really makes sense but I don't know how else to word it.

We'd seen quite a few Cooper's hawks this day but this bird wasn't an accipiter, although I can understand how inexperienced hawkwatchers might have thought that. But even inexperienced birders there this day knew it wasn't a sharp-shinned hawk. Its strongly pointed wings, dihedral wingset, and flight characteristics weren't those of a Cooper's hawk, either. I've seen Cooper's hawks fly with a dihedral mating flight many times in the spring but have never seen one doing that in the fall. This bird just wasn't a Cooper's. And I never even considered peregrine falcon because of this bird's more slight, or light if you will, overall body structure. Nothing about it said peregrine falcon to me.

Greg has far more experience with Mississippi kites than I do. However, I've been to Veracruz, MX, twice, where I saw a good number of them, and I've had a fair share of them multiple times in multiple springs over my property in eastern PA (southern Northampton County). And this past spring (2004) I watched both an adult and immature Ms Kite seek out 17-year locusts near New Hope, about 30 miles south of my place, for more than an hour.

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Gregory George
September 29th, 2004

171-03-2004
Pennsylvania Rare Bird Report
Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)
Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

On Wednesday the 29th of September one Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) was observed migrating south from the North Lookout at Hawk Mountain Sanctuary (Berks County) along the Kittatiny Ridge. Fortunately I was not the only individual at the North Lookout, Arlene Koch, who will also be providing a report, was counting with me. The kite was first picked up when it was over Owl's Head of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary at a distance of approximately 2 kilometers at just above eye level. The viewing conditions for the day were cloudy skies with the limit of clear visibility at about 20km. Winds were from the North at about 5km/hr. The kite was observed with Leica 8x42 binoculars. Soon after the initial observation the kite began to soar and after a few circles it then left the updraft and flapped several times as it went out of sight. The actual determining factor for the identification was the flight behavior as it was both soaring in the updraft and its flapping behavior when flying out of view. This bird displayed a pattern of flight consistent with the numerous other kites I have seen in the past. This was a bird that was long winged and very buoyant in flight. As the kite flew out of view the wings were relatively pointed and a slight dihedral was evident. Due to lighting conditions, distance and the lack of being able to locate the kite in the spotting scope no age for this individual can be determined. The duration of the observation was approximately 1 minute.

At this time I would like to discuss how the kite was separated from other species. **Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*):** The observed bird was not long-winged enough to be a harrier and lacked the harrier's notably long tail. While the observed bird was circling in the updraft there would have been multiple opportunities to see a white rump patch if it was a harrier. I made an effort to find a rump patch and there was none. **Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*):** The observed bird had wings that were pointed much more strongly than would be expected by any Accipiter. As it began to fly out of view after it was done circling the pointed wings were evident as well as its buoyant flight both are not characteristic of a Cooper's hawk. **Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*):** The peregrine falcon would have appeared to be a much more robust and not very buoyant in the air. The observed bird was dainty in comparison as well as very buoyant after it left the updraft and continued flying south west along the ridge. The kite also displayed a slight dihedral as it streamed away. Daintiness, buoyancy and display of slight dihedral are not characteristics of a peregrine falcon.

My experience with Mississippi kites is very strong. I was one of the official counters in Veracruz, México in 2000 and I returned to the site as a tourist in 2002 for two weeks during the Mississippi kite migration. Combining both of my visits to México I have seen well over 300,000 Mississippi kites in México alone. In addition to those individuals I have also seen Mississippi kites during the 1997 fall migration at Grassy Key, FL in the Florida Keys, Cordillera de Talamanca in Costa Rica and this is my third Mississippi kite observed in Pennsylvania. My previous two kites in PA were also from Hawk Mountain.

Based on my experience with Mississippi kites, as well as my experience with raptors of North America overall, I am positive on this identification. I also welcome any additional correspondence the committee deems relevant to the evaluation of this observation.

Yours truly,

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Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round One

Species: Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

Date of Sighting: 20 September 2004 to 20 September 2004

Location: HAWK MOUNTAIN

County : BERKS

Observer(s): Arlene Koch, Gregory George

Date of Submission: 2004

Submitted by: Arlene Koch, Gregory George

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

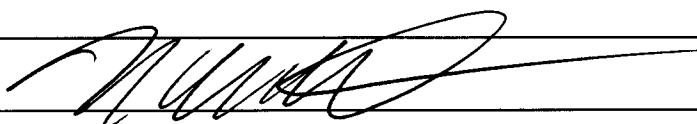
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut		X						
D. Heathcote A. Gwartz		X						
P. Guris				X				
J. Stanley		X						
E. Witmer	X			X				
R. Leberman				X				
M. Sharp		X						
TOTALS		4		3				
DECISION								

Comments: 4/3 GO TO 2ND ROUND

Signature (Secretary)



Date:

11/30/05

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Voting Tabulation – Round Two

Species: Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

Date of Sighting: 20 September 2004 to 20 September 2004

Location: HAWK MOUNTAIN

County: BERKS

Observer(s): Arlene Koch, Gregory George

Date of Submission: 2004

Submitted by: Arlene Koch, Gregory George

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

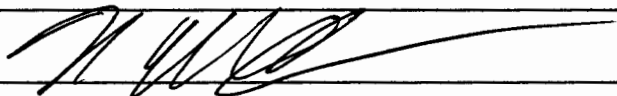
Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A	Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	Abstain
R. Wiltraut		X						
A. Guarente		X		X				
P. Guris				X				
J. Stanley		X						
E. Witmer				X				
R. Leberman Heller				X				
M. Sharp		X						
TOTALS		4		3				
DECISION				X				

Comments: 4/3 on 2nd round

Signature (Secretary)



Date: 6/25/06