

Mississippi Kite

Ictinia mississippiensis

Observer: Jerry McWilliams

Location: Tom Ridge Environmental Center parking lot (Presque Isle Hawk Watch)

Date: May 17, 2017

Time: 9:35 AM

Weather: Variably cloudy, wind SW to 10 mph, temp. about 75 F

Viewing distance: Perhaps 3/4 mile at an angle looking south at its closest distance from me.

Optics: 10 X 40 Zeiss Binoculars and through the Canon camera lens using an F 4 300 mm lens and 1.4 teleconverter.

Details: There were three Turkey Vultures on a glide, when Joao Taveres said, "there is a hawk flying past the vultures." I immediately got on the bird and recognized it as Mississippi Kite. It was on a fast glide with wings spread only for a few seconds before it pulled its wings in and sped up very quickly as it began to descend. It went by so quickly that I was only able to get a few quick shots before it was well past us. I was able to see the following characteristics. When on a glide it held its wings bowed down a bit with the "hands" of the wings arched up. I could see a rather long tail held tightly closed with it only widening slightly towards the end. The tail tip was quite square with just a hint of a notch. The wings were long and narrow throughout, much like a gull and strongly bent back at the wrists. The wing tips were pointed. The head was short and did not extend past the bend of the wings. The shorter outer primary was clearly shorter primary # 9 making the leading edge of the wing look like there was a slight indentation. Because it was back lit so severely, there wasn't much plumage detail that could be seen. However, light passing through the tail showed that it did not have an all dark tail, but appeared to be banded. The bird looked superficially like a Peregrine Falcon, but the wings were too long and narrow, the tail was nearly an even width throughout its length and was squared and slightly notched, not tapering and round at the tip, like a Peregrine. There was no tilting or tipping from side to side when it was on glide, but was very steady and direct. See attached photos.

I have seen many Mississippi Kites throughout the south-central U.S. Their flight pattern and overall shape is quite diagnostic and easily recognizable even at a distance.





