

PA Rare Bird Report

Submission Date	2016-10-22 13:26:51
Observer's Name	Arlene Koch
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Phone	610 253-6377
Observer's Address	1375 Raubsville Road Easton PA 18042 United States
Names of additional observers	none
Species (Common Name)	Mississippi kite
Species (Scientific Name)	<i>Ictinia mississippiensis</i>
Number of individuals	2
Age(s) and Plumage(s) and Sex (if known)	The sky was cloudy; fog had recently lifted from the valley and I couldn't tell age for sure although neither one looked to adult
Observation Date and Time	10-04-2016 11:30 AM
Did you submit this sighting to eBird?	Not yet (please do, eBird is great!)
County	Northampton
Location (City, Borough, Township)	Williams Township
Exact Site (E.g. Name of park, lake, road)	Koch property, 2 miles west of Delaware River, 1 mile north of Bucks County line
GPS coordinates of sighting	40.64957 -75.230627
Habitat	farm valley with secondary ridge on north side
Distance to bird	half mile or so - using 10X bins
Viewing conditions	cloudy, had been fogged in earlier, sun just beginning to shine through
Optical equipment used	Swarowski EL 10 X 42
Description	Two birds jousting up and down relatively low to the wooded hillside as sharpies, a Cooper's, and a harrier moved through overhead. They were in among a small group of blue jays when I first spotted them. My first impression was that they resembled nighthawks, although I knew they weren't. They were about the same size as Cooper's hawks, but thinner overall and with bowed, pointed wings and what looked to be moderately long straight-edged tails. I couldn't get clear views of their plumage because of the lighting, but I saw nothing to indicate the light color of adult birds.

Behavior (be as detailed as possible about what the bird was doing)

The most obvious thing I've always noticed on Mississippi kites is their buoyant flight - up and down and then suddenly deep diving as they grab insects from the sky. And that's how these two were flying even as they went back and forth at each other. This flight style closely resembles the mating flight of spring Cooper's hawks but is different, although it's hard to say exactly how.

Separation from similar species (How you eliminated others)

They weren't buteos, which I am extremely familiar with because I've been counting raptors at various places since the late 70's. They were smaller than a northern harrier, although from a distance it wouldn't be hard to mistake a MS kite for a harrier if you've not seen a lot of raptors, and their bodies were thinner and their wings more pointy than any accipiter. Accipiters just have an overall heavier appearance than MS kites even though they're more streamlined in the air than buteos. But they weren't falcons - bigger than kestrels and merlins but their bodies weren't as heavy as peregrine bodies look, especially at the wing/tail juncture and head size in relation to a peregrine's broad but pointed wings.

Discussion – anything else relevant to the observation that will aid the committee in evaluating it:

After they went back and forth at each other for about 5 minutes, they separated. One flew down ridge, eventually disappearing over the ridge to the west, and the other one went upridge to the about the original spot where I first saw them. This bird then flew around for a short time before suddenly dropping down, circling around, and disappearing either into or over the hillside woods.

Are you positive of your identification ? (Why or why not)

yes - I've seen MS kites several times before on this ridge, while counting at Hawk Mtn, in Texas, in Mexico at Vera Cruz, etc. I realize of course that in spite of 40+ years of raptor counting mistakes can still be made, and I have no photos or corroborating birders to back me up. And any drawing I could do would be terrible.

After

I have several raptor books from P. Dunne, J. Liguori, etc.

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