

General Field Notes

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Mississippi Kites in Northeastern North Carolina

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Between May and July of 1973, Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) were found at two sites in the coastal plain of northeastern North Carolina. Because of the species' rarity in the state, the authors feel documentation of these records is warranted.

On 6 May LeGrand was birding in the Johnston Farm section of Occoneechee Neck in SW Northampton County, N.C., as a participant in the Roanoke Rapids spring count. At approximately 14:00 he saw a single Mississippi Kite flying and soaring over a pasture pond and adjacent riverbottom hardwoods for a total of 2 minutes. The bird was first seen flying about 200 to 250 feet overhead and it then circled four or five times at a height of approximately 200 feet from the ground. Although the hazy sky and white background of the clouds made observations of the bird's coloration difficult, LeGrand was close enough to study most field marks and the distinctive kite silhouette. The tail was black, the undersurface of the wings dark, the underparts gray without any bars or streaks, indicating adult plumage.

On 12 May Lynch saw a kite, apparently the same bird, soaring and gliding with a soaring "column" of Black and Turkey Vultures at the same location described above. From a distance of 500 to 1,000 feet he watched the comparably much smaller kite spiral upwards with the vultures and then glide downward on a straight course almost to tree level, then angle sharply upward once more, flapping its wings only occasionally. He observed the long, slender, pointed wings which were reminiscent of a falcon, and the long, black tail which it fanned out occasionally. The kite appeared to be about the size of a crow and its overall slender proportions were distinctive. It was studied for about 4 minutes before it disappeared beneath the forest canopy.

The kite was last seen on 2 June, almost a month after LeGrand's initial sighting.

On 4 July 1973 Lynch sighted a second individual at Cutawhiskie Creek, a channelized stream about 8 miles W of Ahoskie in SW Hertford County, N.C. This bird was seen at about 17:15 under ideal viewing conditions, gliding overhead no more than 250 feet from the ground. All field marks were checked, including the distinctive kite shape and manner of flight, along with the grayish underparts. This bird was nearly identical to the Occoneechee Neck individual except for a barred tail, a mark indicative of a subadult. Interestingly, this location is only about 21 miles E of the previous sighting.

Pearson, Brimley, and Brimley (*Birds of North Carolina*, revised by Wray and Davis, 1959) list only three records for the state: one killed in Cherokee County on 26 May 1893, another shot in the area soon afterward, and one at Southern Pines on 20 October

1949. A fourth record is a bird sighted on 15 June 1972 by Lynch and Chris Marsh, also at Oconeechee Neck and not more than ¼ mile from the 1973 sightings (*Chat*, 36:112). The presence of two Mississippi Kites in adjacent counties in North Carolina suggests that this species is not so rare as the paucity of recent records would seem to indicate. The species apparently is undergoing a significant range expansion and population increase in the Mississippi Valley region (*American Birds*, 25:824; 26:830), and this could be a factor in dispersal into peripheral regions.

Third Sight Record of the Goshawk for North Carolina

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On 24 December 1972 at approximately 13:30, I was eating lunch in my home about 4 miles W of Chapel Hill, N.C. About 15 Evening Grosbeaks and a number of other birds were at the feeder outside my window some 6 feet away. The birds suddenly flew away in apparent panic. I immediately moved to the window and looked for a hawk. After about 30 seconds I saw a large, grayish Accipiter fly for about 150 feet to another perch. Its size and manner of flight led me to believe that it was a Goshawk. I quickly found my 10 x 50 binocular and carefully went out on our patio. I was able to view the bird for a few seconds at a distance of 150 feet, noting the gray striations on the breast and the long tail before it flew to another perch about 250 feet away. I was unable to obtain a good look at the head of the bird and thus did not note the stripe over the eye. The relatively small size of the bird leads me to suspect it was a male, and the plumage was clearly adult. (See Mueller and Berger, *Auk*, 84:183-191, 1967; and *Auk* 85:431-486, 1968.)

I have seen several hundred Goshawks previously, most of them in Wisconsin, and have live-trapped and banded about 100 individuals. In my 20 years of observing hawk migration at Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, I have become about as proficient in identifying Accipiters as any ornithologist I have known. I am confident that the Chapel Hill bird was a Goshawk.

Personal communications with D.D. Berger and other hawk watchers and banders indicate that the 1972-73 flight may well be one of the greatest southward invasions of Goshawks in recorded history. Unusual numbers of Goshawks were seen in the Great Lakes region, the Pennsylvania mountains, and even at Cape May, New Jersey. Adults were considerably more common than juveniles at all observation points. Thus, the appearance of an adult Goshawk in the piedmont of North Carolina in this winter is perhaps not surprising.

There are two previous sight records of this species in North Carolina, both from the mountains in the southwestern corner of the state (Enloe, *Chat*, 34:79-80, 1970; Pratt, *Chat*, 35:1-4, 1971).

[Dept. Ed.—With the recording of the third occurrence of this northern hawk, it can be placed on the official North Carolina list.]

A Pileated Woodpecker at Bodie Island, N.C.

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24 April 1973

At approximately 09:30 on 21 April 1973 while birding near the Bodie Island lighthouse I heard what sounded like the call of a Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*). Within a few seconds the woodpecker flew from a nearby stand of pines and