

SIGHT RECORD OF A MISSISSIPPI KITE  
(*Ictinia mississippiensis*) IN MASSACHUSETTS

by Blair Nikula, Chatham

Date: May 6, 1986  
Location: North Truro, Massachusetts  
Observers: Blair Nikula and Robert C. Humphrey

At approximately 8:30 A.M. on May 6, 1986, Bob Humphrey and I were driving south on Route 6 in North Truro near the entrance to the Pilgrim Heights parking lot when I spotted a medium-sized raptor circling off the east side of the road at an altitude of approximately 150 feet. I was immediately struck by the bird's kite-like appearance (i.e., smooth dark coloration, long narrow tail, and pointed wings) and quickly pulled off the road. By the time we had stopped, the bird had passed us, but I quickly located it again, circling about 200 yards to the north. The bird continued off in a northwest direction (toward Provincetown), circling lazily with occasional flaps.

After watching it for perhaps thirty seconds, we drove into the Pilgrim Heights parking lot and were able to find the bird again, some 400 yards to the northwest. As the bird continued steadily in a northwest direction, we decided to drive to Provincetown in the hopes of relocating it. However, despite seeing over thirty hawks in an hour or more of searching, we were unable to find the kite.

The bird's circling flight afforded us good, though for the most part rather distant, looks at its silhouette and dorsal surface. The bird was about the size of a small Peregrine Falcon or a Broad-winged Hawk, though much slimmer than the latter species. The tail was long, narrow, and blackish with no apparent markings. The wings were long and pointed at the tips. The upperwings were pale gray, particularly on the inner part (secondaries), darkening to very dark gray or blackish on the primaries. There were prominent, white, rectangular patches on the trailing edge of the secondaries that were visible at a great distance. The back, upper body, and head were pale gray, the same color as the upperwings and had no apparent markings. The underparts appeared smooth and dark but were in shadow throughout the observation and were not seen well. The flight was very buoyant with short, quick downstrokes.

The weather was clear with a 10-15 mph SE wind. The bird was initially almost directly into the sun, but as it passed by, the lighting on it improved rapidly, and for most of the observation, the sun was at our backs. Viewing was done through 8X and 10X binoculars. The writer has seen Mississippi Kites on two previous occasions on Cape Cod and several times in Texas, often in small flocks. Bob Humphrey has had no previous experience with the species.