

Communications

To the editor:

Supplementing the information on expansion of the White-tailed Kite, *Elanus leucurus*, in North and Middle America so well presented by Eugene Eisenmann in the June, 1971 issue of AMERICAN BIRDS, I have recently found indications that here in southern Brazil a similar expansion of range has probably occurred.

H. von Ihering lived in the state of Rio Grande do Sul from 1880 to 1893 during which time he collected or recorded the presence of over 360 species of birds, almost all from the eastern side of the state. Although he included practically all the hawks ever recorded for the region, including several which are now exceedingly rare or extinct in the area, he did not find the White-tailed Kite. Between 1914 and 1927 Rudolf Gliesch assembled a collection of 245 Rio Grande do Sul species, mostly from the northeastern quarter of the state. He also obtained a large number of hawks but no record of the White-tailed Kite. Oliverio de Oliveira Pinto's *Catalogue of the Birds of Brazil*, published in 1937, does not include any record of the White-tailed Kite for Rio Grande do Sul. In two years of weekend and vacation observing and collecting during 1946-48, I did not see the bird.

The first records for the state are apparently those of Oswaldo Camargo, who collected two females in February, 1960 at different locations within the northeastern quarter of the state.

During the course of an avifaunal survey of Rio Grande do Sul which I am conducting under the aegis of the Smithsonian Institution and the Museu Nacional of Rio de Janeiro, with assistance from the Frank M. Chapman Fund, I have recorded the White-tailed Kite in the 19 months from September 1970 through March 1972 no less than 56 times in 39 different sectors of 30" of latitude and 30" of longitude. These sightings have been widely scattered throughout the state, but with by far the greatest number in the northeast quarter where von Ihering's and Gliesch's work was concentrated. My sightings cover every month of the year except April and June, and these exceptions are probably due to limited observation in those months rather than to an absence of Kites. I have no breeding records, but did sight two immature birds on February 16, 1971 near the western tip of the state. I have never seen concentrations of these kites, but always just one or two birds, widely separated from the next sighting.

Although present day facilities for travel throughout Rio Grande do Sul are vastly improved over the times of von Ihering and Gliesch, greater mobility could hardly be the explanation for my now finding this conspicuous bird relatively common while those careful observers never saw it in their combined 26 years of collecting.

Most of the forest which covered much of the northern half of the state even as late as Gliesch's time has now given way to agriculture. Thus more habitat suitable for this kite is now available, and this could well have encouraged spread of the bird. However, the areas where von Ihering and Gliesch concentrated their collecting were those where agriculture was already important. We can conclude, then, that if the White-tailed Kite was present at all in their day, it must have been very rare or they would have seen it.

—William Belton, Caixa Postal 119,
Gramado, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

To the editor:

On Wednesday, March 29, I received two telephone calls, one from North Platte and one from Colorado, to report sighting of a Common Crane (*Grus grus*) near North Platte on March 26 (and afterward) by the Denver Field Ornithologists. Since those who saw the bird were uncertain that they had obtained satisfactory photographs, they wanted me to try also. I went as far as Elm Creek the evening of March 30 with plans to go to North Platte the next morning. The weather was bad Friday morning with snow flurries, overcast sky, and a 30 m.p.h. north wind. Because conditions for photography were so bad I decided to go into my blind near Elm Creek instead of going to North Platte.

My blind there is in a pasture on the Glen V. Morse farm 5 miles west of highway 183 and just south of the Platte River. This farm is 100 miles east of the area near North Platte where the Common Crane was sighted March 26-April 1 (each day) by various members of the Denver Field Ornithologists. At 10:45 A.M. March 31 (CST) a Common Crane walked into my camera viewfinder as it came to drink in the pasture near Elm Creek. On March 31, shortly after 9 A.M. (CST) Mr. John W. Reddall of Denver saw a Common Crane a little west of North Platte in the same area in which it had been seen previously. Thus there were 2 sightings on the same day 105 minutes and 100 miles apart. It seems almost certain that there were two Common Cranes in the Platte Valley. Mr. Reddall reported that the North

Platte bird was feeding in a cornfield and did not fly during the period of observation on March 31.

At Elm Creek on April 1 Mr. Morse saw the bird flying from the pasture into an adjacent corn field a little after 9 A.M.; I saw the bird at 6:30 P.M. flying west toward the Overton roost. It was reported that the North Platte bird was also seen on April 1, but I have no details.

The Common Crane at Elm Creek was about the size of a Greater Sandhill Crane; the plumage had a brownish cast in contrast to the gray of adult Lesser Sandhill Cranes; there was deep and much more extensive black on the primaries, secondaries and retrices than is evident in Lesser Sandhills; the neck and head were black except for the white and red described below; the division between the black neck and body was as sharp as in a Canada Goose; a conspicuous white area began on the side of the head back of the eye (which seemed red) [bare skin—Ed.], extended in a stripe down the side of the neck and met the stripe from the other side in a V at the back of the neck; a small spot of red [bare skin—Ed.] was present at the rear of the crown of the head; the bill was yellow, tinged with green near the base.

The Common Crane at Elm Creek behaved like an adult; it seemed to maintain somewhat greater distance from the Lesser Sandhills than the latter

customarily do among themselves, and enforced this distance with an attack feint towards birds that blundered too close. This type of behavior is seldom exhibited consistently by immature Lesser Sandhills, although seen among adults. The group of cranes with which the Common Crane associated seemed to be familiar with this behavior and seemed to avoid coming too close. The Common Crane drank, fed along the stream and in the pasture, and slept in my view for five hours on March 31, after which it flew off to feed with the flock of about 30 birds with which it was associating. I photographed the bird in color at 120 feet and in B & W at 200 feet with a Hasselblad and 500 mm. lens. This Common Crane behaved in every way like a wild sandhill crane during the period of observation.

Since I have been unable to find a book which gives sequence of plumage of the Common Crane, I cannot determine whether the bird at Elm Creek was an immature or an adult. My first inclination was that it must be an adult because of its behavior. However, the lack of a full red cap and the brownish cast of the plumage would indicate a sub-adult if the plumage sequence is anything like that of Lesser Sandhill Cranes. Perhaps the pictures will make it possible for someone to determine age of the bird. [Appears to be an adult—



Common Crane with Sandhills, Elm Creek, Nebr. Mar. 31, 1971. Photo/Mary M. Tremaine.

Ed.] The North Platte bird was described as gray with red on the head, and was thought to be an adult.

Since Lesser Sandhill Cranes nest in Siberia and use the North American flyway, it is reasonable that two Common Cranes (which nest in the same area) might occasionally migrate with the Lessers. Well documented records from Alaska (Gabrielsen, *Birds of Alaska*) Alberta and Saskatchewan (Godfrey, *Birds of Canada*) indicate that this does occur, although it must be infrequent from the paucity of records. Presence of the two Nebraska birds in separate flocks 100 miles apart could easily be explained by accidental separation during panic flights occasioned by hunting in Texas or Mexico (whichever route the birds followed). It would be interesting to know if these birds were sighted elsewhere in North America in this migration season. Escape from a zoo as an explanation seems unlikely in view of the behavior of the birds: (the North Platte bird was described as exhibiting the same behavior as the wild Lessers).

On the weekend of April 8-9 cranes were virtually gone from the North Platte area; the Common Crane was not seen; a small remnant of approximately 2,000 birds was still present in the Elm Creek-Overton area, but the Common Crane was not amongst them (although I could not be certain I had found all of the small groups which were still there).

—Mary M. Tremaine, 3860 Harney St.,
Omaha, Nebr. 68131.

To the editor:

The Monk Parakeet (*Myiopsitta monachus*) is a recent newcomer to our mid-Atlantic seaboard. A native of southern South America, this species has been widely imported and sold in pet shops as an interesting cage bird. Some have escaped their owners; others presumably were freed, while in John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. As late as 1968 about 12,000 of these parakeets were imported into the United States. Some are apparently surviving and breeding in the wild for they have been reported from western Long Island to the eastern shore of Virginia.

The adult Monk Parakeet is about 11½ inches long, greenish gray above with a lemon yellow belly. Forecrown, cheeks and forethroat and breast are softly quaker gray with darker feather edges. The species builds large communal nests which may be added to year by year. Each pair of parakeets has its own private compartment but the entire flock seems to be on intimate terms. The eggs number 4 to 6, are white and rounded.

This exotic will bear careful watching lest it become an agricultural and garden pest. In Argen-

tina it seriously damages sunflower, corn sorghum, millet and many fruits including citrus. Costly attempts to control it have been unsuccessful. Annual crop damage in Argentina has been estimated at ten million dollars a year.

Climatically and habitat-wise, this bird should be adaptable to much of our mid-Atlantic and Southern States. Its present range and potential impact has, as yet, not been well established but is, of course, of concern to birders, biologists, gardeners and agriculturalists. Reports on its occurrence, abundance, spread and status by way of determining whether it is a welcome newcomer or a distinct pest would be most helpful. All thoughtful environmentalists will agree that there is no excuse for allowing more exotics that could become pests to be acclimatized in North America. Let's determine, now, before this species spreads further, whether it is likely to become an interesting adjunct to our bird fauna or a serious nuisance.

More information on the monk parakeet is available free in Leaflet 496 of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

—Gardiner Bump, Formerly in Charge,
Foreign Game Investigations United
States Bureau of Sport Fisheries and
Wildlife.



That Brigantine Gyr again. This time
feeding on a Black Duck. Photo/Adrian Dignan