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140-19 Beech Avenue, Flushing, New York.

 THE SWALLOW-TAILED KITE IN THE NORTHEASTERN STATES

BY WILLIAM F. RAPP, JR.

MOST authors of works dealing with birds of the Northeastern States say that the Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus forficatus* (Linn.)) is a rare bird in this area. None have attempted to define the use of the word *rare* and it might mean anything from one record to twenty-five. Such terms as rare, uncommon, common, unusual, *ad infinitum*, are purely relative and require some further qualification. At least if writers in the past had given some definite figures to qualify the word *rare* we would have some indication as to the relative abundance or scarcity of the Swallow-tailed Kite. Bent (1937:52) has attempted to give all the records for this bird, but has missed some of them. The object of this paper is to give all the records for the Swallow-tailed Kite in the Northeastern States and to consider the possible causes for the occurrence of this bird in this area.

To date the Swallow-tailed Kite has been recorded thirty-three times in the Northeastern States. In this study the Northeastern States means the following States: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. With four exceptions, all of these records are sight identifications. As Cruickshank (1942:129) has stated, this species is so unmistakable

that sight identifications made by experienced observers under ideal conditions seem unquestionable. Keeping the above points in mind I present the following list of records.

CONNECTICUT

- Litchfield, July 29, 1938 (Ripley, *Auk*, vol. 57, p. 247)
- Lyme, July 2, 1877 (Merriam, *Birds of Conn.*, p. 76)
- New Britain, May 24, 1940 (*New England Bird News*, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 32)
- Portland, summer of 1861 (Sage & Bishop, *Bull. 20, Geo. & N. H. Survey*, p. 20)
- Saybrook, June 16, 1889 (Bagg & Eliot, *Birds of the Conn. Valley in Mass.*, p. 114)

MASSACHUSETTS

- Cohasset, May 17, 1940 (*New England Bird News*, vol. 4, no. 5, p. 32)
- Northampton, 1880 (Morris & Colburn, *Birds of the Conn. Valley in Mass.*, p. 11)
- West Newbury, Sept., 1882 (specimen in the Peabody Museum, Salem, Mass.)
- Whately, prior to 1870 (Bent, *Bull. U. S. N. M.*, no. 167, p. 53)

NEW HAMPSHIRE

- Franklin, 1875 (Dearborn, *A Preliminary List of the Birds of Belknap & Merrimac Cos., N. H.*, p. 13)

NEW JERSEY

- Bordentown, July 28, 1883 (Abbott, *Science*, vol. 2, p. 222)
- Chatham, 1873 (Herrick, *Forest & Stream*, vol. 12, p. 165)
- Southern Cumberland County, June 4, 1893 (Stone, *Ann. Report of the N. J. State Museum*, 1908, p. 159)
- Morristown, Sept. 18, 1887 (Stone, *Ibid.*)
- Nixon, May 19, 1940 (Rapp, *Wilson Bull.*, 1941, p. 196)
- Princeton, "some years ago" (Stone, *Ibid.*)

NEW YORK

- Chappaqua, Westchester County, Oct. 2, 1927 (Pangburn, *Auk*, vol. 45, p. 98)
- New York (specimen no. 61729 in the Academy of Natural Sciences, Phila., Pa.)
- New York City, April 30, 1928 (Cruikshank & Hickey, *Proc. Linn. Soc., N. Y.*, 1929)
- Piermont, Aug. 22, 1900 (Nicholas, *Auk*, vol. 17, p. 386)
- Pittstown, June 19, 1900 (Eaton, *Birds of N. Y.*, p. 65)
- Raynor South, Long Island, summer of 1837 (Giraud, *Proc. Linn. Soc.*, 1907, p. 126)
- Rensselaer County, July & Aug., 1886 (Bendire, *Life History of N. A. Birds*, p. 168)
- South shore of Long Island, 1845 (Bent, *U. S. N. M. Bull.*, 167, p. 53)
- Stephentown, April 10, 1895 (MS notes of A. K. Fisher)
- West Hoosick, township of Pittstown, July 16, 1886 (specimen no. 402 in N. Y. State Museum, Albany, N. Y.)

PENNSYLVANIA

- Beth Ayes, Montgomery Co., autumn, 1920 (specimen in the Academy of Natural Sciences, Phila., Pa.)
- Jerseytown, Aug. 18, 1894 (Kester, *Proc. Del. Valley Ornith. Club*, vol. 7, p. 76)

Lancaster County (specimen in the Museum at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa.)
 Philadelphia, July 4, 1791 (Barton, *Fragments of Nat. History*, 1799, p. 7)
 Philadelphia, 1857 (Stone, *Birds of N. J. & E. Pa.*, p. 85)
 Philadelphia, spring of 1888 (*Proc. Del. Valley Ornith. Club*, vol. 5, p. 7)

VERMONT

Waitsfield, April 26, 1913 (Davis & Richardson, Bull. no. 41, Vt. State Dept. of Agriculture)

It has been suggested that the South American subspecies (*Elanoides f. yetapa* (Vieillot)), may be the Swallow-tailed Kite which comes into the Northeastern States and not *E. f. forficatus* which breeds in the Southern States. Zimmer (1938: 1) has shown that species or subspecies which nest nearer to the equator tend to wander further north than species which nest at distances from the equator.

E. f. forficatus and *E. f. yetapa* are such closely related subspecies that they cannot be separated by field observation. The characters which separate these two subspecies lie in the color of the scapulars and interscapulars. In the typical race, *E. f. forficatus*, these feathers are glossed with dark purplish black, and in *E. f. yetapa* they are glossed with dark ivy green. The four specimens which were collected in the Northeastern States were studied and they were typical *E. f. forficatus*.

TABLE I
 SUNSPOT NUMBER FOR THE TWO-WEEK PERIOD
 PRECEDING THE OCCURRENCE

Period	Sunspot No.	Mean for year
June 1877	13.4	12.3
July 1883	80.6	63.7
July 1886	30.3	25.4
Sept. 1887	7.4	13.1
June 1889	6.4	6.3
June 1893	88.2	84.9
Aug. 1894	70.3	78.0
April 1895	76.9	64.0
June 1900	12.1	9.5
Aug. 1900	4.3	9.5
April 1913	.9	1.4
Oct. 1927	63.1	69.0
April 1928	80.6	77.8
July 1938	165.3	109.6
May 1940	54.5	67.8

There are several possible reasons why the Swallow-tailed Kite comes into the Northeastern States. The first two of these reasons are theoretical, but have their basis in that they do affect other forms of bird migration, but the occurrence of the Swallow-tailed Kite in the Northeastern States must not be considered to be a form of migration.

DeLury (1924:417, 1925:293) and Wing (1934a:150, 1934b:302) have shown a relationship between northern migrations and sunspots. In the case of the Swallow-tailed Kite there is no relationship as Table 1 shows. It is interesting to note, however, that of these fifteen records nine occurred in months when the sunspot activity was above the mean for the year. The sunspot data were taken from tables compiled by Brunner. The numbers used are the standard Wolf numbers used to express sunspot activity.

In July, 1938, the sunspot number was 165.3, the highest for the year. In the fourteen days prior to the 29th when a bird was seen at Litchfield, Connecticut, the highest daily sunspot numbers for that year occurred. In May, 1940, three birds were seen and the sunspot number was the lowest for that year. In the first part of May the lowest daily numbers for the year occurred.

Some ornithologists think that tropical storms may cause the extra-limital flights of the Swallow-tailed Kite. Mr. J. B. Kincer of the United States Department of Commerce, Weather Bureau, Washington, D. C., checked all the wind speeds for the two-week period preceding the dates given in Table 1. In none of the periods were there any strong southerly winds along the Atlantic coast, nor were there any tropical storms which might tend to drive the birds northward.

Since neither of the two foregoing reasons fit the case the only logical explanation seems to be that the Swallow-tailed Kite is inclined to wander northward. The majority of ornithologists believe that wandering is a common habit of many species of birds. Just what is the cause of this wandering is hard to say. One possible explanation is that at some time in the past the Swallow-tailed Kite nested in this area and that these occurrences are a hang-over from that time.

CONCLUSION

To date the Swallow-tailed Kite has been recorded thirty-three times in the Northeastern States and the only satisfactory explanation which may be given is that these birds are inclined to wander northward.

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130 Washington Avenue, Chatham, New Jersey.

GENERAL NOTES

Two Interesting Age Records.—Blue Jay B272177, banded at Summerville, S. C., on March 18, 1934, was found dead about half a mile from the place of banding in early June, 1944. As the bird was an adult when banded, it must have been at least eleven years old when it died.

A banded male Cardinal has been reported as still coming to the feeding shelf of a farmer next door neighbor in Summerville on May 25, 1944. As no males of this species were banded there after the spring of 1936, it is fair to assume that this bird, also banded as an adult, is at least nine years old. He is reported as feeding his mate, which appears to be a young and vigorous bird.—WILLIAM P. WHARTON, Groton, Massachusetts.

Catbird Returns.—From May, 1937, to June, 1944, one hundred and eighty-six Catbirds were banded at the Ardmore, Pa., station. Twenty-eight individuals of this number returned, which represents about 15% of the number banded. The 28 individuals made a total of 48 returns.

While a 15% return is about the average expected in Catbird returns, yet this percentage would not have been reached in my Catbird returns had it not been for a fortunate capture of a special group of 13 Catbirds banded during the month of May, 1941. Seven of these 13 birds, or 60.7%, returned. Without these 13 birds and the seven returns they developed, my return percentage on the remaining 173 Catbirds would have been about 12% instead of 15%.

It is evident that in order to determine an accurate return percentage of most species, it is necessary to have a large series covering a considerable period of time.

The returns of the seven particular birds were interesting, and are as follows: One returned three years after banding.

Two returned one and two years after banding.

Four returned one, two and three years after banding.

Since all seven returns were adult birds when banded in May, 1941, five of them are now at least four years old.

Another Catbird returned not included in the seven returns mentioned above, is an adult female banded in May, 1940, and returned each year in May, 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944. This Catbird is now at least five years old.—HORACE GROSKIN, 210 Glenn Road, Ardmore, Pennsylvania.

Unusual Nesting of House Wrens.—For many years Baltimore Orioles, one or more pairs, have built their nests in the lower branches of a large elm tree near my home at Lily Pond, Cohasset, Mass. During the nesting season I always put short pieces of colored yarn on the lawn which the orioles use by weaving into the nest with other materials.

Last year the nest was built in the elm and hung on a level with the second story windows. The birds reared a brood and vacated, whereupon a pair of House Wrens took over and reconstructed the nest for their own use by carrying in the usual sticks which filled it almost completely. A brood of young wrens was