

NOTES

FIRST RECORDS OF THE WHITE-TAILED KITE IN WASHINGTON

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The range and population size of the White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) have been increasing in western North America and Central America since the late 1940s (Eisenmann 1971). This expansion was evident in Oregon in the 1970s, as kites became established residents at several Rogue and Willamette valley locations (*American Birds* Regional Editor's files) and the first breeding record for the state was obtained at Finley National Wildlife Refuge, Benton Co., in 1977 (Henny and Annear 1978).



Figure 1. White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) 6 km west of Raymond, Pacific Co., Washington, on 23 February 1978.

Photo by J. Davis

NOTES

The first sighting of a White-tailed Kite in Washington was on 10 July 1975, at the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, Thurston Co. Stephanie Mason, Ellen Ratajak, Pam Searles and I observed the bird for 4 minutes in good light. I recorded the following details immediately after the observation:

At 1340 I saw a light colored bird approximately 100 m away being mobbed by swallows. The bird was harrier sized with a white head, underparts and tail, medium gray mantle, and black on the upper wing coverts creating a sharply defined black patch on the shoulder. As I watched, it veered away and flew higher, heading in a southerly direction and keeping its wingtips pointed as it flapped or soared. In contrast to two gulls soaring near it, its wings appeared much longer and slenderer, and its tail longer. I did not see the shape or color of the soft parts.

Notes from the others present indicate that they saw a dark, decurved beak, white tail, wings on top "lightish gray blue with darker shoulder patches," and the resemblance of the bird to a gull and a harrier. I was the only observer with previous experience with this species. Identification was unanimous. The bird could not be relocated subsequently, though we were in the area for several weeks after the sighting.

The Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge is located at the mouth of the Nisqually River on southern Puget Sound. The refuge lands were formerly salt marsh which was diked and converted to agricultural land. The extensive meadows are no longer grazed, but were hayed regularly through 1975. The area supports a high microtine population (Bowman and Dobos 1975).

The second substantiated sighting in Washington was on 27 November 1977, when I located a single kite 6 km west of Raymond, Pacific Co. This bird was not seen again, despite several searches, until 29 January 1978 when Phil Mattocks and Gene Hunn found it at the same location. Subsequently it was readily found by many observers through 9 April 1978 and was photographed (Figure 1). On one occasion, 17 March 1978, two kites were present (*American Birds* Regional Editor's files). A single bird was noted there in late July 1978 (Harrington-Tweit et al. 1978) and on 29 April 1979, a kite was seen 1.5 km northwest of South Bend, Pacific Co. (Hunn and Mattocks 1979). This site is only 2 km west of the Raymond airport. All of these sightings were from diked pasture land in the Willapa River estuary. Abundant runways and droppings throughout the many *Juncus* tussocks and patches of short grasses indicate the presence of a large microtine population.

Two additional sightings have been recorded from Clark Co., just north of the Columbia River and the areas where kites were first reported from Oregon almost 50 years ago (Gabrielson and Jewett 1940). On 17 September 1978, a single bird was reported from Ridgfield National Wildlife Refuge, diked bottomland along the Columbia River (*American Birds* Regional Editor's files) and a pair was seen on 8 March 1979 near Vancouver (Hunn and Mattocks 1979). The most recent sighting in the state was of a single kite flying south over the sand dunes, 1 km east of the ocean beach, at Ocean Shores, Grays Harbor Co., on 17 August 1979 (Mattocks and Hunn 1980).

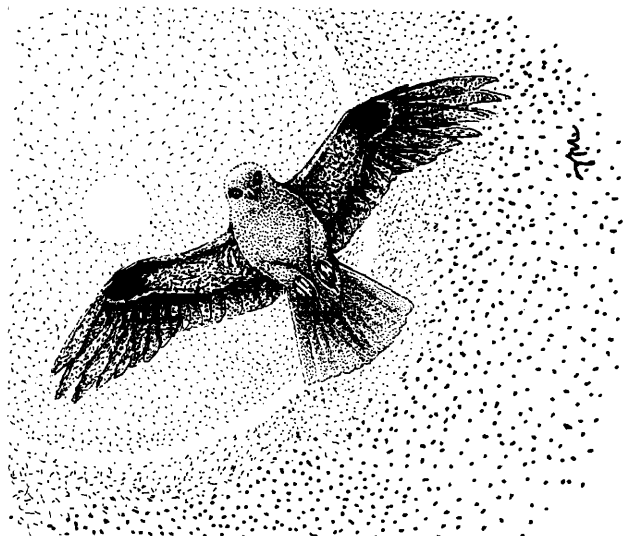
I thank Jack and Ada Davis for providing photographs, and Phil Mattocks for providing additional information on sightings.

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White-tailed Kite

Sketch by Tim Manolis