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COLORADO FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS - SIGHT RECORD FORMNEW STATE RECORD UNUSUAL RECORD

Please print or type. Attach photographs and additional pages if necessary.

Species: American Swallow-tailed Kite Elanoides Forficatus
(Vernacular Name) (Scientific Name)Date(s): July 5, 1993Number of birds seen: 1 Sex: ? Plumage: BasicLocality: Willow Creek Park Elevation: 3622Nearest town: Lamar County: ProwersTime(s) observed: 0800-0810Duration of observation (e.g. 1 sec., 5 min., etc.): Aprx 9 Minutes

Other observers who saw the bird with you (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):

None

Other observers who saw the bird independently (give names, addresses, telephone numbers):

unknown

Light conditions (position of bird to light and shade, direction and strength of light):

Mostly clear, sun to bird's back, observed from various angles

Optical equipment used (e.g. power, types): Swift Audubon 8.5 x 44Distance, and how measured: Estimated. Bird aprx 25' in tree, observed from many positions including from within 10' from below.If photographed, type of equipment and film: none

Who else photographed the bird?

Describe the bird's behavior (e.g. flying, feeding, or habits used in identifying): Please see attached
Bird was perched in tree. American Crow started to harass, causing bird to fly. Flight was graceful, sweeping S turns with slow unlabored wing beats.

Describe in detail the bird's relative size, overall shape, plumage and color pattern. Include details of bill, wing and tail shape. Give particular emphasis to marks you used to identify the bird. Reference to its resemblance to field guide descriptions and illustrations is not enough. Describe only what you actually observed in the field: Please see attached. Medium sized raptor profile. Perched bird was white below with black back, wings and tail. Head and face white. Hooked "raptor" bill and talons of medium gray color. Dark eye. No facial markings. Perched posture showed 3 distinct "points" at the tail, which were the two tail tips and the closed wings. In flight: FORKED TAIL. Long pointed wings

Description (continued): From below, body and underwing coverts white, flight feathers and tail black. White and black very intense, with sharp separations between colors.

Describe the bird's song and call, if given, including method of delivery, (i.e. from perch, in flight, duration): None given.

Prior Experience: This was my first Am Swallow-tailed Kite. I am quite familiar with the common raptor species found in state, and have done several trips specifically to observe raptor species. This is a very distinctive bird, and not especially similar to any other bird on the state list.

the state list.
Describe the general and specific habitat in which you observed the bird: Urban park, with mature trees. Bird was perched in bare Cottonwood tree, overlooking a clearing with a creek running through.

How did you eliminate similarly appearing species? Readily visible talons and hooked bill clearly identified this bird as a raptor, eliminating any seabirds or such. The long forked tail, sharp black and white markings and unmarked white head are unique. The lack of color in the talons and bill contradict many raptors, including Northern Harrier, Falcons, Swainson's Hawk and Mississippi Kite (MiKi). The light underwing coverts with dark flight feathers is a pattern shared only with Swainson's Hawk. Buteos, Accipiters, Osprey, Eagles, Vultures and Harriers are eliminated by wing shape. This bird was clearly larger than MiKi (several adult and sub-adult MiKi were in same locale for immediate comparison), lacked any eye markings and had crisp coloring with sharp separations, not the gradual gray tones of MiKi.

a) at time of observation: After making the attached sketch, Identification was verified with National Geographic Society 2nd Ed. Field Guide to the Birds of North America. Further verification from Peterson Field Guides "Hawks" and "Hawks in Flight" by Dunne, Sibley and Sutton.

This report was written from reports made during xx, after observation xx from memory xx

Date and time report was written: July 23, 1993 retyped 8-9-93

Reporting observer: Walter Hackney Signature: 
14426 'D' E. Hawaii Cir
Address: Aurora, CO 80012
303-750-2823

Return to:
Bill Prather
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Walter Hackney
 14426 'D' E. Hawaii Cir
 Aurora, CO 80012
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July 23, 1993

At about 8:00 AM on July 5, 1993 I drove into Willow Creek Park in Lamar in search of the Mississippi Kites (MiKi) Known to breed there. As I crossed the bridge at the south end of the park I noticed a raptor type silhouette in a bare cottonwood just north of the brick tower, at the edge of the creek clearing. I parked near the center of the park, starting birding here. I worked west to the edge of the trees, then south down the clearing. The morning sun was to my left as I approached the bird. It was still perched on a sturdy branch, about 25' up, facing west into the clearing with the sun to it's back.

My first prolonged view was from broadside, about 25 yds away. I verified that it was a raptor by body shape and posture and by head and bill profile. The most striking feature at this range was the contrast between the body's white color and the solid dark color of the wings, back and tail. Also notable were the "three points" (see sketch) at the tail. I closed range to about 15 yds, concentrating on finer marks. There was no yellow in the legs or bill of the bird. The head was white with no markings. I specifically observed the eye area, looking for any eyebrow or such, and found none.

I approached to the tree, head on to the bird. Standing in the shade of the trunk, the sun was off to the right, allowing a good unblinded view from below. The bill and talons did not at any time appear as anything more than unmarked neutral colored- not black, but not specifically pigmented.

I moved again to about 10 yds south of the bird. With the sun to my right, shining on the side of the bird, I **reverified all markings**. The bird was well lit, and observed from several angles for about 8 minutes.

While at this final observation point, an American Crow started calling, then made several swooping dives at the bird. The crow finally harassed the bird enough that it flew from it's perch, over my head, circling back then making a number of wide swerving "S" turns as it flew off just above the trees. I observed the bird for several seconds as it flew with the Crow in pursuit, finally going out of sight to the northeast.

Viewed in flight from below, the black and white colors remained sharply defined. The body and underwing coverts were white, the flight feathers black. The most prominent feature was the long "V" shaped tail. The bird's body was larger than the Crow's, the wings longer with pointed tips. The bird flew very gracefully, without much labored flapping.

I walked to where the bird disappeared, then looped back to my car. As soon as I returned to the car I made the notes and sketches on the sheet included with this report. I verified my I.D. to the National Geographic Second edition.

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I then again attempted to relocate the bird, taking time to closely study the MiKis that are abundant in the park. Of the 11 MiKis studied, all showed varied shades of gray with no sharp contrasts. The tails were all notably shorter, and of course without the swallow shape. Several were sub-adult plumaged, showing tail banding. The harassment by the Crows was repeated on the MiKis, giving a good yardstick for size. All of the MiKis were notably smaller than the Crows.

This bird was an obvious raptor. The erect, alert posture on it's perch was typical. The silhouette of the bird was a fair sized raptor with a round head. The head was not especially large. No specific shape features were overly prominent, except the tail. The long forked tail was the most obvious field mark. The pointed shape of the wings would eliminate any raptors but falcons and kites. The head shape was not correct for a falcon. This bird's head seemed smaller in relation to the shoulders, and more rounded.

Comparisons to field guide information:

National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America, Second Edition: Plate on page 187 shows bird perched with the "3 point" tail profile as in notes and sketch.

Hawks in Flight by Dunne, Sibley and Sutton: Specific identification from any similar appearing birds. Wing shape distinguishes it from any mentioned raptor species, Bill and talons eliminate any seabird.

Hawks Peterson Field Guides by Clark and Wheeler: Note photos 3c and 3d pg 122- tail length of sighted bird not quite as long tipped as 3c, but notably longer than 3d's immature. There were no indications of any streaking or other immature markings as noted in any of the above references.

This report has been edited from several pages of notes written at various times on the day of observation. The attached sketch page was made shortly after the bird flew off, and prior to any field guide study. I reported this bird to the C B R from Lamar at about 10:00 AM. I searched until about noon, but was not able to relocate the bird. To my knowledge, this bird was not resighted.


Walter Hackney

10-93-38

8:00 AM 7-5-83

ABOUT IRON SKED - LONG WINGS BARS TREE
FROM BELOW IN FLIGHT WITH SUN T
BODY LIGHT WINGS & TAIL DARK -
NOTED THAT CONTRAST FAIRLY SHARP -
HARSHED BY CROW - BODY SIZE SIMILAR - WHITE
DNEP LITTLE LARGER - GRACEFUL BIR
INNER WING LIGHT (WHITE). -
COLORS CLEAN BLACK & WHITE - GUE
LIKE INTENSITY

COMP TO MISS KITE - LEGS NOT YELLOW HEAD
WHITE, PERCHED BIRD
SHOWED WHITE LOWER
BODY & DARK ABOVE.
WHITE HEAD. NO
DISTINCT COLOR TO EYES
OR BILL STOOD OUT WITH
BACKLIGHT

* 3 DISTINCT PROFILE
IN PERCHING

WHITE WINGS & BODY
INNER WING

