Florida Field Naturalist

PUBLISHED BY THE FLORIDA ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

VOL. 47, NO. 3 SEPTEMBER 2019 PAGES 99-129

Florida Field Naturalist 47(3):99-104.

FIRST FLORIDA RECORD OF DOUBLE-TOOTHED KITE (*Harpagus bidentatus*)

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The Double-toothed Kite (*Harpagus bidentatus*) is a widespread Neotropical raptor, occurring as a resident in lowland forests from central Mexico south through Central America and Amazonia to central Brazil and Bolivia (AOU 1998). In eastern Mexico it occurs north to northern Oaxaca and the Yucatán Peninsula, with a few sight reports from southern Veracruz (eBird). On the west coast of Mexico it occurs north to Nayarit (eBird). The only previous record north of Mexico was a second-year bird photographed by David Hanson at Boy Scout Woods on High Island in Galveston County, Texas, on 4 May 2011. That record was accepted by the Texas Bird Records Committee of the Texas Ornithological Society (Carpenter 2012) and then added to the American Birding Association's Checklist (Pranty et al. 2012).

On 15 October, 2018, Al Hansen and BH–"the observers"–were birding in the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area in northwestern Hernando County, Florida. In the distance, they spotted a bird of prey perched in a dead pine tree, silhouetted against the sky. The sun was on their right shoulders, and they always had a clear view of the bird. The site was on Three Bridge Road, 0.3 km north of the intersection with Rattlesnake Camp and Scrub Island roads. (28.621148, -82.580357). Habitat in the area is mixed scrubby flatwoods, with a hardwood swamp immediately north of the tree where the bird was perched.

With a 82-mm Nikon Fieldscope III, with a 38-power fixed lens, the observers studied the bird for 25 minutes and took 112 in-focus photos of it. They moved closer and continued to scope and photograph the bird. Finally, when directly underneath the bird, BH was able to photograph its ventral side (Fig. 1).

The bird appeared to be smaller, and the back and wings much darker, than a Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*), the common *Buteo* in central Florida forests and which the observers see frequently. At the time the observers first spotted the bird, it had its back to them, and it preened during the entire time they watched it. With the scope they noticed a large white eye ring on the bird's medium gray head. There was a noticeable contrast of color between the head and the back. The back looked black, with large splotches of white. The black tail (Fig. 2), not as long as an *Accipiter* sp., had three narrow white bands, as well as a very narrow white terminal band. The primary extension of the wings appeared to reach the most posterior of the narrow white bands. When the bird lifted its tail while preening, they saw a large patch of white feathers, presumably the undertail coverts. These white feathers are also visible in the photos that BH took of the front of the bird. While directly underneath the bird, BH was able to

Figure 1. Double-toothed Kite at Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area, 15 October 2018. Note the diagnostic vertical, central throat stripe, compact size, and broad white and rufous barring of underparts characteristic of the northern subspecies *H. b. fasciatus*. Photograph by Bev Hansen.

Figure 2. Double-toothed Kite at Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area, 15 October 2018. Note the dark-gray back, short black tail with three thin white bars, and heavily barred outer primaries. Photograph by Bev Hansen.

see the bird's underparts, which were densely barred pale rufous and white from the throat to the vent (Fig. 1). The chin was white, bisected by a thin, dark vertical line (Fig. 1). A few of the photographs show the unusual tomial feature for which the bird is named: the cutting edge of the upper mandible has two tooth-like protrusions (Fig. 3). The base of the bill was ivory, and the remainder of the bill was dark gray. The iris was orange. The feet were golden, with black claws. When the wings were spread, the underside of the primaries showed dark and white bars (Fig. 2), but the folded wing looked dark.

The bird never vocalized while the observers were present.

Identification of raptors can often be difficult. In the field, the observers immediately realized that the bird was not an *Accipiter* sp.,

Figure 3. Double-toothed Kite at Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area, 15 October 2018. Note the diagnostic double "tooth" on the maxilla, from which the English and scientific names are derived. Photograph by Bev Hansen.

because the tail was too short (Fig. 2). The small size eliminated any *Buteo* species. The thin white stripes on the tail contrasting with a dark background reminded the observers of a Merlin (*Falco columbarius*), but the shape of the bird's head and gray color of the head with the white eye ring eliminated Merlin as a possible identification. While watching the bird, they consulted their field guide (Dunn 2006) but were unable to identify it. Later that day, after consulting several other field guides of North American birds and finding no match, BH submitted three photographs and a description of the bird to Birdbrains, a list server for central Florida birders. Within half an hour, four people had replied, all identifying the bird as a Double-toothed Kite. The observers looked at photos of Double-toothed Kite on eBird and other Internet sources, and concluded that this was the bird that they had seen.

Diagnostic features for Double-toothed Kite are the small size, compact shape with shortish dark tail with thin white bands, the dark central throat stripe, barred reddish underparts, and barred undersides

of the primaries (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001, Schulenberg et al. 2007). The bird was certainly not a juvenile, as juveniles are browner above and whiter below with vertical dark streaking, as opposed to the horizontal rufous and gray barring on adults. The bird was likely a male, judging by the limited amount of rufous on the sides of the neck and breast (Ed Kwater, pers. comm.). Of the two subspecies, *H. d. fasciatus* is by far the more likely, occurring from Mexico south to Colombia and west Ecuador (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). The nominate subspecies occurs only in South America east of the Andes. The plumage matches *fasciatus* as well, with the underparts showing more pale gray interspersed between rufous bars (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). The kite appears to have had a mixture of worn central rectrices and more fresh outer rectrices. The primaries look lightly and evenly worn, and do not show any signs of damage that may occur on individuals that have been held captive. That afternoon and for several days afterward, many birders scoured the area. On Tuesday, 16 October, Will Chatfield-Taylor reported a brief sighting of a Double-toothed Kite from Chassahowitzka Wildlife Management Area (Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee files), but other birders in the vicinity did not see the bird.

While the origin of this Double-toothed Kite may never be known, it should be noted that Hurricane Michael headed north over the Gulf of Mexico a few days earlier. On 2 October the National Hurricane Center began tracking a low-pressure system east-southeast of the Yucatan Peninsula. By 7 October this had become a tropical depression, and the next day it quickly intensified in force. It passed west of Hernando County on 9-10 October before making landfall at Mexico Beach, Bay County, Florida, as a category 4 hurricane on 10 October.

Double-toothed Kites appear to be mostly sedentary, although some breeders on Trinidad may leave seasonally for mainland Venezuela (ffrench 1991). Other than Trinidad and the Bocas del Toro Archipelago in northwest Panama, Double-toothed Kites appear to be largely absent from most islands off the coast of Central America, such as the Bay Islands in Honduras, or Cozumel in Mexico. There are no records from the Greater or Lesser Antilles. EBird lists one observation for each of the three islands off the Pacific coast of the Azuero Peninsula in central Panama (Cebaco, Coiba, and Canal de Afuera). None of these observations includes details or documentation, however. Although the lack of long-distance migration and few records from coastal islands may indicate a decreased likelihood of vagrancy in this species, the previous occurrence in Texas illustrates that this species has some capacity to wander. The species does soar to great heights on occasion (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), increasing the likelihood that especially strong winds, e.g., from a storm like Michael, could blow

it off course, and perhaps out into the Gulf of Mexico, where it could wander until reaching Florida's Gulf Coast. The record in Texas could also have resulted from trans-gulf vagrancy. On accepting the Texas record, the American Birding Association Checklist Committee (CLC) wrote "Much of that committee's debate concerned origin, particularly the means by which a supposedly sedentary forest species might have reached coastal Texas. TBRC's [Texas Bird Records Committee] files indicate that the species does fly at high altitudes at times, and Jesse Fagan has reported to the TBRC that some movements of this species occur during the dry season in El Salvador. It is worth noting that the species is unrecorded at the "River of Raptors" hawk watch in Veracruz. It is also worth noting that ffrench (1991) reported Double-toothed Kites on Trinidad primarily from January to June and wondered if the species migrates to the mainland. If such crossings occur, then perhaps the Texas bird arrived at High Island via a trans-Gulf crossing rather than by proceeding up the east coast of Mexico and Texas. Because the species is not kept for falconry and is essentially unknown in captivity, the TBRC treats this occurrence as pertaining to a naturally occurring vagrant, a decision endorsed unanimously by the ABA CLC. (Pranty et al. 2012)."

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge Ed Kwater's research concerning the subspecies, sex, and age of the bird. We thank Bruce Anderson and Mark Schulze for suggestions that improved the manuscript.

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