

THE MISSISSIPPI KITE IN ARIZONA

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The Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) is generally considered a bird of south-central and south-eastern United States, breeding from Kansas and South Carolina south to Texas and Florida (AOU, Check-list of North American birds. Fifth ed. AOU, Baltimore. 1957, p. 101). In recent years it has been found breeding in southeastern New Mexico (J. P. Hubbard, Check-list of the birds of New Mexico, New Mexico Ornithol. Society Publ. No. 3, 1970).

It was, therefore, quite a surprise when my brother John and I found four individuals of this species on 7 June 1970 about 5 mi. S of Winkelman in Pinal County, Arizona, along the lower San Pedro River. The sight of these kites feeding on the wing among the giant cactus (*Carnegiea gigantea*) and other desert vegetation was unusual indeed.

We returned to this area on 9 June 1970 and found one pair in flight, feeding over the desert. Another pair was sighted in flight directly over the town of Hayden, Gila County, Arizona, about 2 mi. NW of Winkelman.

On 15 June 1970, we returned to this area and counted at least eight Mississippi Kites along the San Pedro River downstream from the mouth of Aravaipa Creek to the Gila River. One of them was bar-tailed, indicating that it had been raised in 1969. An adult female was collected and is deposited in the National Museum of Natural History, Washington, D. C. She had slightly enlarged ovaries and what appeared to be the beginning of a brood patch.

On our next visit to the area, 24 July 1970, my brother and I located a kite nest. An adult was shading a downy chick, approximately three weeks

old, from the intense heat in the nest located about 40 ft up in a pole-sized cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*).

Judging from the amount of riparian habitat available along this stretch of the San Pedro River, the number of individuals sighted, and their distribution, it is our calculated guess that as many as 10 pairs of Mississippi Kites inhabit this particular area. Amadeo M. Rea found nine individuals in the Mammoth area along the San Pedro River about 20 miles above Winkelman on 19 August 1970. At least seven of these were in adult plumage (pers. corr.).

This species has not heretofore been recorded in Arizona. Phillips et al. (The birds of Arizona, Univ. of Ariz. Press, Tucson, 1964) do not mention the species in their definitive work.

It is interesting to speculate on whether this colony represents newly occupied territory, or whether it merely has been overlooked in the past. With the many ornithologists, past and present, investigating southern Arizona, it seems unlikely that so conspicuous a bird could be overlooked. Phillips commented on the absence of the Mississippi Kite in Arizona in light of its recent range expansion into New Mexico (The instability of the distribution of land birds in the Southwest. Papers Arch. Soc. New Mexico 1:153, 1968).

One thing is sure! Be this species an ancient or recent arrival in Arizona, its elimination appears virtually certain. The riparian habitat it requires along the San Pedro River south of Winkelman is scheduled for phreatophyte eradication and river channelization by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, for water salvage and flood control purposes (R. R. Manes and B. Bristow, The Fatal Future, Wildlife Views, Ariz. Game and Fish Dept., June 1970) and there will end the life of the Mississippi Kite in Arizona!

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CENSUS OF THE BIRDS OF
CLIPPERTON ISLAND, 1968

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No one reading the literature on Clipperton Island (Sachet 1960) can fail to be struck by the statements concerning the number of the birds living on this island. When the American captain, Benjamin Morell, went ashore at Clipperton on 17 August 1825, he found "myriads of sea-birds." Later, in 1839, Sir Edward Belcher, drawing the first map published by the British Navy from Clipperton, stated that "the whole island was covered with birds." In 1858, when the lieutenant commander Le Coat de Kerveguen took possession of Clipperton on behalf of the French government, he affirmed, "the number of the birds on this island is innumerable." More recently the French geologist, A. G. Obermuller (1959), asserted, "the island is inhabited by a multitude of birds, the number of which is difficult to appreciate, but there

is no doubt that there are more than 50,000 individuals."

Nobody else seems to have taken a census of the birds on this island, the emerged surface of which is not over 1.8 km². As I had already committed myself (with a group of 16 men) to count the very abundant landcrabs (*Gecarcinus planatus* Stimpson, Ehrhardt 1968a), I undertook to determine the bird populations (Ehrhardt 1968b). The group of 16 was divided into eight teams, each in charge of a particular area. This procedure enabled us to determine not only total numbers but also the distribution on the island of each species.

CENSUS TIME AND AREAS

The time to start the counting was an important factor. Indeed, such an operation made in broad daylight would have given misleading results because most birds would have been fishing. We also had to take account of the different times of return of all species. For example, the terns (*Anous stolidus ridgwayi* and *A. tenuirostris diamesus*) return between 16:00 and 17:00 (sierra time), while the boobies (*Sula leucogaster nesiotis* and *S. dactylatra granti*) are still fishing, and the frigatebirds are flying off and soaring. At 17:30 the first boobies are returning,