

SHORT COMMUNICATIONS

J. Raptor Res. 29(1):30-31

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ADDITIONAL RECORDS OF WHITE-TAILED KITES IN BAJA CALIFORNIA SUR, MEXICO

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KEY WORDS: *Baja California; distribution; Elanus leucurus; white-tailed kite.*

The northwestern distribution of the white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*¹) was believed to range from southwestern Washington south to northwestern Baja California (Johnsgard 1990). The kites occur mainly in open country and semiarid regions where they feed on small rodents and insects (Brown and Amadon 1968, Johnsgard 1990). This species suffered a precipitous decline at the turn of the century; however, since the early 1960s the white-tailed kite has extended its breeding range in the western United States (Pruett-Jones et al. 1980), probably due to the changes in land-use practices, specifically increased irrigation for agriculture (Johnsgard 1990). Intensive agricultural practices in southern Baja California are relatively recent, and the presence of white-tailed kites in this region is probably related to the increase in these practices over recent years (pers. obs.).

Grinnell (1928) reported a sighting of this species on the Mesa San Carlos (29°45'N, 115°10'W; Fig. 1), as the southernmost record. Much later, Wilbur (1987) reported that white-tailed kites were uncommon residents along the Pacific coast and adjacent valleys from San Quintin north and occasionally south of Guerrero Negro (27°50'N, 113°50'W; Fig. 1). Wilbur (1987) did not believe these records indicated a range expansion in Baja California. Howell and Webb (1992) suggested a range expansion based on records in Baja during the month of June. In this paper we report both winter and summer records of

white-tailed kites in the Cape Region of Baja California Sur, the most southern location for the species on the Pacific coast.

In November 1989, we first observed two adults perched on fences around a field in Ciudad Insurgentes (25°10'N, 111°48'W; Fig. 1). Howell and Webb (1992) also observed five kites (two of which were juveniles) at Ciudad Insurgentes in June 1992. In December 1993, during research in agricultural areas at El Carrizal (23°46'N, 110°19'W; Fig. 1), we observed at least eight kites hunting in three different locations. We were unable to discern if individuals were adults or juveniles in this month because, according to Brown and Amadon (1968), a post-juvenile moult begins in July, and before the following spring juveniles resemble adults. In February 1994, five adults were observed in the same area, and again in May 1994, at least three individuals were seen hovering in the same agriculture lands at El Carrizal. In addition, three kites were recorded hunting in another cultivated field, at Chametla-El Centenario (24°05'N, 110°25'W; Fig. 1). In the latter case, a pair was observed in courtship activities. This behavior corresponded to the description given in Brown and Amadon (1968) for breeding pairs.

The increased incidence of white-tailed kites in Baja seems to be correlated with an increase in agricultural activity, which was strongly promoted in Baja California by the Federal government in the 1950s (Tejas et al. 1991). This activity has grown mainly in the Ciudad Insurgentes-Ciudad Constitución, Centenario-Chametla and El Carrizal regions. Our observations imply that the Cape Region is a wintering area for the kite because the kite population drops during March to April. However, the increase in agricultural practices in this region may have also promoted a range expansion of the white-tailed kite in Baja California. Our May records of kites in the Cape Region, as well as the juveniles observed in June 250 km to the

¹ Amadon et al. (1988) and Sibley and Monroe (1990) consider that *leucurus* is the American species of *Elanus* which is not conspecific with the Old World *caeruleus* species. We follow this assumption.

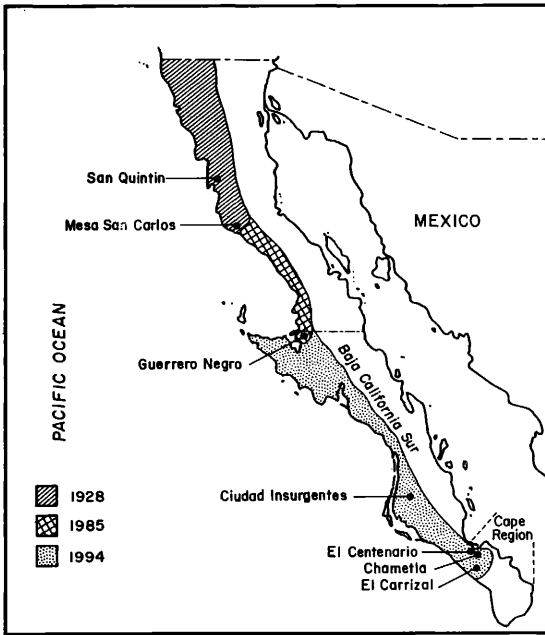


Figure 1. Range expansion of the white-tailed kite in the Baja California peninsula. Solid black circles are the localities where kites were reported since 1928 (Grinnell 1928), 1985 (Wilbur 1987) and 1994 (Howell and Webb 1992, this study).

north by Howell and Webb (1992), indicate a high probability that white-tailed kites are now breeding throughout the Baja California peninsula.

Subsequent searches for nests and fledglings in southern Baja will help to correctly determine the breeding status of the white-tailed kite in the Baja California peninsula.

RESUMEN.—En este trabajo se presenta información nueva sobre la situación actual de la población del milano cola blanca (*Elanus leucurus*) en Baja California Sur, México. Según nuestros registros de 1989, 1993 y 1994, la porción sur de la península es un área importante para la permanencia de individuos invernantes. Pero además, la reciente conversión de grandes extensiones de tierra a uso agrícola en el sur de la península, parecen haber benefi-

ciado la expansión de las poblaciones reproductoras de la especie. Al parecer, *E. leucurus* se reproduce actualmente en el sur de Baja California.

[Traducción Autores]

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Abelino Cota gave valuable field assistance. S. Pruett-Jones, Eugene S. Botelho, and an anonymous reviewer greatly improved an early draft. R. Bowers improved the English. Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología and Centro de Investigaciones Biológicas del Noroeste supported this study.

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Received 13 June 1994; accepted 5 October 1994