

NOTES

A WHITE-TAILED KITE BREEDING RECORD FOR OREGON

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A pair of nesting White-tailed Kites (*Elanus leucurus*) was located on the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge 20 km south of Corvallis, Benton County, in the Willamette Valley in early March 1977. This is apparently the first confirmed nesting record for the species in Oregon (about 275 km north from California border), although there is considerable evidence that nesting occurred the previous year in the same vicinity. During an aerial waterfowl survey on 1 April 1977, an incubating bird was observed on the nest. Young were being fed on 11 April; however, when the nest was revisited on 9 May, three dead young (approximately 1 week old) and an addled egg remained. Heavy rains in mid-April may have caused the nesting attempt to fail.

The nest was located in the top of a hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.) about 5 m from the ground. It was effectively concealed from below, but easily observed from above. The nest was lined with hair of the Gray-tailed Vole (*Microtus canicaudus*), as described by Hawbecker (1940). Voles, which are abundant in an old field adjacent to the nesting site, have been reported as the major prey of White-tailed



White-tailed Kite nest was located in this old field on the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge, near Corvallis, Oregon.

Photo by John T. Annear

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Kites (e.g., Hawbecker 1940, 1942; Bond 1940; Stoner 1947; Dixon et al. 1957; Stendell and Myers 1973). In fact, Hawbecker (1942) concluded that kites are seen only in a type of habitat that supports *Microtus*.

Single kites were observed on the Finley Refuge 13 February 1967, 12 April 1973, and 4-5 June, 13 July and 20 July 1974. One was observed almost daily from 18 October 1975 until early April 1976, when two birds were sighted together. These birds were later seen in aerial courtship behavior and carrying nesting materials, but a nest was never located. Two adults and two young kites were seen from mid-July 1976 into autumn. On 17 August Annear observed the adults carrying nesting material and placing it in a hawthorn. Copulation took place but subsequent observations revealed no further activity at the site. Suspicions that there were more than four birds on the refuge were confirmed on 16 October when five kites were sighted, and again on the Audubon Christmas Bird Count on 22 December when seven kites were found. On 14 July 1977 four kites, apparently paired, were observed on the refuge.

Early published records for White-tailed Kites in Oregon include a sight record by B. H. Lampman east of Portland along the Columbia River, and another sight record on 23 February 1933 about 32 km west of Portland in the Columbia River bottoms (Jewett 1933). In addition, Laval (1947) reported two immatures near Old Broken Top Mountain about 40 km west of Bend on 4 August 1947. During the last decade several sightings of White-tailed Kites have been documented in Oregon (see *Audubon Field Notes* and *American Birds*) which suggests a general range expansion northward.

Not many years ago the White-tailed Kite was considered rare in the United States. May (1935:7) wrote: "The White-tailed Kite . . . is today in very real danger of complete extirpation in the United States, where it is now very rare and local." He reported that the entire breeding range of the United States population, which once included much of western California, southern Oklahoma, eastern Texas, southern South Carolina, eastern Georgia, and Florida, was reduced to portions of the Sacramento Valley and San Diego region of California, and the coast of extreme south Texas. However, White-tailed Kites began increasing in San Diego County in the late 1930s (Dixon et al. 1957). And, by the 1960s, a great population increase and range expansion had become apparent in California. White-tailed Kites have recently extended their range (including the breeding range) through the Central American countries (Eisenmann 1971). Warner and Rudd (1975) believed that these increases (at least in California) were probably due to the kites' tolerance of habitat disruption by expanding agriculture, and to the increased abundance of prey species (*Microtus californicus*) that thrive under agricultural conditions (Krebs 1966). Eisenmann (1971) reported that the White-tailed Kite has been noted, at least occasionally, in most California counties and suggested that their range is still expanding. Nesting occurred in 1969 even in the extreme northwestern Del Norte County (Hehnke 1970). So, it was apparently only a matter of time until the breeding range extended further north into Oregon.

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