

FIRST CONFIRMED NESTING OF THE BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE IN WASHINGTON

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The range of the Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) in the United States has been described as restricted to southern Texas, California (west of the desert and the Sierra Nevada), Florida, Louisiana, and Oklahoma (rare) (American Ornithologists' Union 1957). The species has been expanding its range during the last 30 years, however (Eisenmann 1971, Larson 1980), and has now been reported in at least 22 states (American Ornithologists' Union 1983, Clark and Wheeler 1987, Touns et al. 1985).

On the Pacific coast, records of the Black-shouldered Kite breeding in California extend into the last century (Taylor 1887). In Oregon, the earliest kite observation was reported by Jewett (1933) near Portland. Henny and Annear (1978) located the first breeding pair near Corvallis in 1977.

Kites were first recorded in Washington on 10 July 1975 at the Nisqually River delta, Thurston County, and on 27 November 1977 near Raymond, Pacific County (Harrington-Tweit 1980). The species has since been reported at Raymond annually (Terry Wahl pers. comm.). Elsewhere in southwestern Washington, kites have been seen regularly at Toledo, Lewis County, Grays Harbor, Grays Harbor County, and on the Long Beach Peninsula, Pacific County (Phil Mattocks pers. comm.). The northernmost record for the state is for 29 October 1983 near Samish Island, Skagit County (Thais Bock pers. comm.) Although this location lies only 30 miles south of the Canadian border, the species has yet to be reported in British Columbia (R.W. Campbell pers. comm.).

Although there have been observations of at least four separate family groups in the southwestern part of the state during the last decade, we here report Washington's first confirmed nesting record for the Black-shouldered Kite.

On 12 May 1988, Batchelder watched a pair of kites copulate atop a Sitka Spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) near the Raymond airport. On a later visit (26 May), he saw an adult kite capture prey and carry it to the same tree. A month later (28 June), a transfer of prey between two adults was observed. The bird receiving the prey then flew into the nest site. The following day, we used a Questar telescope (54 \times) to confirm the presence of at least one live downy young in the nest. We estimated it to be approximately 10-14 days old.

We revisited the site on 23 July and approached the nest tree for the first time. We found three dead chicks, half-grown (Burke Memorial Washington State Museum specimen no. 43032). We could not determine the cause of death, although we suspect it was related to an unseasonably cold, wet period in late June.

The nest was 20 inches in diameter and 5 inches thick. It was composed of sticks from both deciduous and coniferous trees and had a mat of mammal fur 1 inch thick on its floor. It was situated against the north side of the main trunk, 54 feet above ground and 4 feet below the top of the tree. The nest was well concealed and very difficult to see from the ground.

The nest tree was located in a row of spruce, red alder (*Alnus rubra*), and willow (*Salix spp.*) bordering the eastern boundary of the airstrip. The surrounding area, located at sea level, is open, flat pasture land reclaimed historically from the adjacent mudflats of Willapa Bay. Vegetation consists of grasses, Canada Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), Common Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), and tussocks of *Juncus*.

NOTES

During the last six years, at least four other family groups, all of late-season flying birds, have been observed in southwestern Washington, but no nests have been reported. In 1982, R. Widrig (Harrington-Tweit et al. 1982) found two adults and two juveniles flying together at Leadbetter Point, Pacific County, on 18 and 23 September. On 5 September 1984, L. D'Veck (pers. comm.) saw two adults feeding a single young near Oysterville, Pacific County. In 1987, on 18 August, B. Harrington-Tweit located two adults and four immatures near the Raymond airport (Mattocks 1988), and on 7 September, L. D'Veck (pers. comm.) observed another adult feeding three young near Oysterville.

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