

FIRST RECORD OF THE BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE FOR CANADA

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On 26 April 1990, we made two independent sightings of an adult Black-shouldered or White-tailed Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) at the Alaksen National Wildlife Area (NWA) and the George C. Reifel Migratory Bird Sanctuary (MBS). Both locations are on Westham Island, which is situated about 15 km south of Vancouver, in the mouth of the south arm of the Fraser River in southwestern British Columbia (49°10'N, 123°05'W). These adjoining federally protected areas are a vital part of the Fraser River delta, one of the most important bird habitats in North America (Butler and Campbell 1987). The Black-shouldered Kite was not recorded for Canada by Godfrey (1986) or Campbell et al. (1990), and these sightings represent the first records of the species for Canada.

The kite at Alaksen NWA was sighted about 1800 hrs. by Smith. As the bird hovered over a field of fall rye its white underparts were visible as it poised itself with head down and tail held forward. This posture is exactly as illustrated in the National Geographic Society Field Guide to the Birds of North America (Scott 1983). The kite hovered for several seconds in strong sunlight, less than 10 meters from the ground, not 30 meters from the observer. The wings were long and pointed, and the underside of the tail was completely white. As the bird made a gliding turn it showed black patches on the inner portion of the ventral leading edges of the wings. The yellow cere at the base of the upper mandible was noticeable. Smith watched the bird for several minutes as it moved across the field, hovering in different locations. All observations were made with the naked eye from an unobstructed vantage point at the roadside.

Ireland made the second sighting about 30 minutes later at the Reifel MBS. Its proximity to the first sighting suggests that this was the same individual. The bird was first seen as it glided over a slough, then as close as 50 meters as it circled overhead. This observation was made with 8 × 45 binoculars. The bird was a medium-sized hawk slightly slimmer than a male Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*). It was very white below and light grey above with large black patches on the upper wing; a dark blackish area was noticeable around the eye. All observed characteristics indicate this bird was an adult.

Additional sightings of Black-shouldered Kites in British Columbia were recorded 5 and 7 June 1990 (Siddle 1990, Weber 1991). The bird seen on 5 June was observed for about 30 minutes as it perched on a fence post near the Fraser River in Delta. This sighting was about 17 km east of Westham Island. The latter sighting was at Pitt Meadows, 30 km east of Vancouver. This bird showed signs of immaturity so was evidently different from the adult seen 26 April at Alaksen. On 24 April Mr. and Mrs. B. Williams, from Ontario, reported a bird fitting the description of a Black-shouldered Kite on Westham Island while on their way to visit the Reifel MBS (R. W. Campbell pers. comm.).

Black-shouldered Kite populations have fluctuated strongly and have increased recently. The species' range has been expanding with its population (Eisenmann 1971, Henny and Annear 1978, Larson 1980, Roberson 1980). Common in California, this kite prefers grasslands and farmlands, where it preys primarily on rodents and insects and nests in the crowns of densely foliated trees. Anderson and Batchelder (1990) reviewed historic records of the Black-shouldered Kite in the

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Pacific Northwest and reported the first confirmed nesting of the species in Washington state in 1988. The occurrence of this species in British Columbia has been expected in light of its range expansion over the past several years.

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