

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE VISITS DUTCHESS COUNTY: A FIRST RECORD FOR NEW YORK STATE

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The Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*), which is widespread in the Old World, has lately been lumped with the New World White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*).

The Black-shouldered Kite has a varied appetite which includes snakes, lizards, field mice, chipmunks, grasshoppers and sometimes small birds. Although some foods on this list were not available on its visit to Dutchess Co. on 26-27 April 1983, it could still find an ample food supply.

Chuck Roda, who considers himself a non-birder, watched this bird with black elbow markings at about 3 p.m. on 26 April as it hovered like a kestrel while hunting over the wet valley back of his home near Hopewell Junction, NY. This valley is composed of meadows, wet areas, deciduous trees along fence rows, and small wood lots. At approximately 6 p.m. we received an improbable telephone call. By 6:30 p.m. we had positively identified this Black-shouldered Kite as it perched atop a deciduous tree. We watched it for about a half an hour before it flew away. Using a 20-power scope we observed this falcon-shaped kite at about 100 yards on a bright sunny evening in excellent light. We took note of large black patches on the bend of the wing of this white and light gray kite. The head, tail, and underparts were white; the back light gray; the wings were long and pointed (almost as long as tail when perched); the bird had a black, hooked bill; a red eye; yellow feet and cere; and the tarsus was feathered half way down in front. The gray back continued up the back of the nape; and the wings were twice as long as the tail.

The next morning, 27 April, Vaughn Morrison found the Black-shouldered Kite less than a quarter of a mile from the first sighting. Other observers on the 27th were Ken and Joan McDermott and Dave Kintzer. It was observed for about two hours.

After January the species has completed a molt and is renewing its scapulars and tail feathers. Except for wing quills, which are probably not shed until later, a young bird is practically adult by spring.

Young birds are at first streaked with warm brown, and often dangle their feet in flight. This tame and elegant kite was shot in

large numbers by farmers who thought they threatened their chickens. The North American population was reduced to a pitiful remnant and it was feared the species might be extinct here. Recently, however, it has staged a surprising and unexplained comeback, and is again rather numerous in Texas and California.

Once the kite sights prey, it hovers a moment—kiting, or soaring, when the wind blows hard, and beating slowly when it lulls. Then, holding up long pointed wings in a V, the kite slips down for the kill.

The Black-shouldered Kite, a non-migrant, is at home in California (west of desert areas), Texas, and lowland areas from Baja California and Tamaulipas south to Chile and Argentina.

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