WV BIRD RECORDS COMMITTEE REPORT FORM
Please Type or Print Legibly

Species: Mississippi Kite
Number: (leave blank)

Location: National Conservation Training Center, Jefferson Co.
Date: 9/20/16
Time: 6:00PM

Bird Seen: 9/20/16 To: 9/20/16 Age/Sex: Adult, likely female

Description: In lieu of physical material substantiating a record (e.g., specimen, diagnostic photograph, vocal recordings) a complete written description can serve as verification for the biological record. Please be as thorough as your field notes allow. Do not feel constrained by the space provided. Additional supporting descriptions/illustrations may be attached. Note that photographs or recordings WILL NOT BE RETURNED but become part of the permanent record for the observation.

Structure: (Overall size and shape plus details on the head, feet, tail, etc.)
Small/medium raptor with slender body, long narrow pointed wings & long tail. Dimensions of length and wingspan comparable to Peregrine Falcon, but much more lightweight.

Plumage: (e.g. markings, coloration, molt)
Unpatterned gray undertail, wings & tail a bit darker. Did not particularly note a whitish head so lean toward an adult female rather than male. No banding on tail or streaking on chest/belly. Slight brownish tinge on nose might have been due to wear, or to lighting as sunset was approaching. Largely seen from underneath and brief views of upperparts were at a poor angle, generally appeared dark & could not clearly see white wingpath.

Description of any vocalizations, if heard:
None

Description of behavior:
Soaring at altitude of ~ 200 feet with graceful light motion, occasionally giving a burst of 2 or 3 flaps. Not really circling on a thermal, but moving in unhurried meandering curves until I lost sight behind trees in the northeast.
Habitat: (General and Specific)

Scanning over tall grassy field, bordered by deciduous forest, southern end of Tappap Neck trail on southern edge of National Conservation Training Center campus, Jefferson County near Shepherdstown.

Circumstances of observation: (Include details of distance to bird, optics employed, lighting in relation to observer and the bird)

200' set up and several hundred feet horizontally. Watched for about a minute through six binoculars, good lighting, sun getting low in sky to west while bird moved from east to northeast.

Previous experience with this species:

I live in Oregon and this was my first sighting of a Mississippi kite. I did review several videos of Mississippi kites in flight after the sighting and general appearance and flight style was a close match, I am very experienced with all similar species as noted below.

Experiences with similarly appearing species which are eliminated by your description: (Please be specific)

Northern Harrier - would not show pointy wings, uniform dark underparts - lazy in power flight & slight, typical larger & more massive Falcons - would have more powerful direct flight, not lazy soaring - dark underparts at typical - too large & Kaskel too small Prairie Pigeon of similar dimensions but more robustly built Buzzards & Accipiters would have rounded wings & numerous plumage differences Nighthawks - would have white wing mark, dropping beats, V shaped gliding, narrower wings.

Other observers: (Names, Addresses, E-mail please)

If the others agree with your identification they can sign this form here. If they care to provide additional details they can submit their own report.

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:

Additional observer signature:
Books, illustrations and advice consulted, and especially how did these influence this description:

Sibley guide, National Geographic guide, these influenced my assessment as likely female, but only confirmed my initial species ID. Field marks of short 1st primary + solid tail were described in text and I almost certainly could have observed them but did not remember to look for them specifically - so did not include in report.

How long after observing this bird did you first write this description?

6 days - initial field notes are attached to eBird report, were written a few minutes after.

Mail to: WV Bird Records Committee
Attn: Wil Hershberger
170 Stallion Ct.
Hedgesville, WV 25427
Or E-mail to:
wilhershberger@mac.com
I was not expecting to see this species, but did not find it difficult ID-at no time while watching it did I think of the bird as a falcon, harrier, or other hawk. I did not realize it was a particular West Virginia rarity until I started researching it the next day.
Mississippi Kite 9/20/16, c. 6:00PM
NCTC campus, Terrapin Neck Trail
- 200' over fields
- watched for a minute through binoculars

slender, lightweight body, pointed wings, long tail
not falcon or harrier
underside gray-brown, unpatterened

- gliding, often
- occasional soaring
- light, graceful, meandering curves
- unharried, measured wing