

Mississippi Kites nest in Rockford: Illinois' most northerly breeding record

Article by Dan Williams
Photos by Vic Berardi



On Monday, 18 August, Chuck Johannson happened to meet Lee Johnson, a long-time Rockford birder and the master bird-bander at the Sand Bluff station. Chuck told Lee about the kites and, on Tuesday, 19 August, Lee and his wife, Lynda, went to the Bloom School parking lot, which has excellent fields of view in three directions. Lee and his wife saw a kite, and a report was posted on the Rockford area telephone birding hotline.

Left: An adult Mississippi Kite holds a Chimney Swift in its talons on 24 August 2008. Swifts were commonly fed to the chick that hatched in July 2008 in Winnebago County.

Below: A Mississippi Kite chick waits in its Winnebago County nest for a meal on 24 August 2008.

On 7 July, 2008, Mike Eickman, a volunteer at the Sand Bluff Banding Station in Winnebago County, was on his way to a meeting of the Sinissippi Audubon Society Board of Directors. The meeting was being held at the home of Chuck and Jamie Johannson, who live in the neighborhood very near the C. Henry Bloom School in northeast Rockford (Winnebago County). It was a windy, blustery day and a front was moving through. As Eickman approached the Johannsons, he saw a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*), an Illinois-endangered species, fly overhead.

Over the next few weeks, both Johannsons saw an unusual bird, and sometimes two, flying around the neighborhood. They subsequently came to identify the birds as Mississippi Kites. The Johannsons also saw the kites perched on dead trees or limbs near their home, and looking back, Jamie Johannson recalls seeing birds with the same shape as

kites in the neighborhood for several weeks before the 7 July meeting.

The Bloom School neighborhood is park-like, with the Rock River about three-quarters of a mile to the west, and the Spring Creek valley about one-half mile to the north. Spring Creek joins the Rock River to the northwest of the neighborhood. Between the Rock River and the school is a city park that has the Rock River as its western boundary and a tree-lined golf course on its eastern edge. There is also a large wooded cemetery and the wooded campus of the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford in the area, both about four blocks west of Bloom School.

Between Spring Creek on the north and the school is a neighborhood of homes with many mature trees in a well-wooded setting, and, in the immediate area right around Bloom School, a neighborhood of more homes with many trees of various ages.

