



Above: A juvenile Mississippi Kite takes off on one of its first flights on 7 September 2008 after fledging from a Winnebago County nest. Note that the two outer tail feathers are not yet fully grown.

Below right: An adult male Mississippi Kite feeds an insect to a juvenile in Winnebago County on 7 September 2008.

On Wednesday, 20 August, Dan and Barbara Williams went to the Bloom School lot and saw two adult Mississippi Kites. Various observers over the next couple of days saw one or two birds. On Saturday, 23 August, Rob Gough discovered a nest in the neighborhood which he showed to Larry Balch and Ari Nok. There was one chick in the nest.

On Sunday, 24 August, Dan Williams, Vic Berardi, and his wife, Ann Berardi, saw three adult Mississippi Kites (a male and two females) in the vicinity of the Bloom School parking lot. The three observers saw two adult birds (the male and a female) carrying food and, in one

instance, the three adult kites, one of which was carrying a Chimney Swift (*Chaetura pelagica*) in its talons and likely pursuing a potential predator. The neighborhood had Broad-winged (*Buteo platypterus*) and Cooper's (*Accipiter cooperii*) Hawks, both adults and immature birds of each species, during the entire course of the observations reported here.

An adult male and an adult female kite were both frequently seen perching in a dead elm tree in a small grove of trees adjoining the school parking lot. While perched, the birds were often eating prey items, including Chimney Swifts. Barbara Williams found primary feathers from Chimney Swifts under the perch tree. The feathers are now at the Burpee Natural History Museum in Rockford.

On 27 August, the chick was out of the nest for the first time and, by 29 August, it was flying to nearby trees. It frequently gave its whistled call, which was repeated by the adults, who were seen coming and going with deliveries of food, including cicada, dragonfly, praying mantis, monarch butterfly, grasshopper, and Chimney Swift. The latter menu item was fascinating, both because the adults were successful in catching swifts on several occasions (including once while we watched) and because we thought that the acrobatic and elusive swifts would not likely be a prey item. Older

sources including Bent (1937), who admitted in his writings that he had never seen a Mississippi Kite in his life, wrote "birds apparently are never molested, and small birds show no fear of it." Recent research, however, has shown that "vertebrates... such as small birds and mammals are more frequent and important prey than commonly thought" (Parker 1999).

Nesting habits

In their normal breeding range – Mississippi, Louisiana, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, and adjacent to floodplains on the northern edge of the nesting range (Wheeler 2003) – Mississippi Kites tend to nest in loose colonies in open forest savanna-type of settings (Bent 1937), which include residential areas, golf courses, cemeteries, parks, and campuses (Wheeler 2003). Since the mid-1970s, kites have nested abundantly in many urban areas (Parker 1999). The Bloom School area contains this kind of habitat, just a lot farther north than the species' normal breeding range!

The northern edge of the Mississippi Kite's breeding range in Illinois is in Union, Alexander, Calhoun, Jersey, Monroe, and Randolph counties, all along the Mississippi River in the southern and west-central part of the state, with multiple years of occurrence during the nesting season.

