

Mississippi Kites typically lay one to two eggs, and very rarely three; two is the normal clutch size (Parker 1999). Studies of breeding kites in southern Illinois showed that 21 of 33 nests held only one egg (Hardin et al. 1977, Evans 1981).

The normal period from hatching to fledging for a Mississippi Kite chick is 30-35 days (Wheeler 2003). Working back from the fledging date on 27 August puts the hatch date for the young Mississippi Kite in Rockford at roughly 23 July. The normal period of incubation from the date the egg is laid to the date of hatching is another 30 days (Wheeler 2003) so the approximate date for laying the egg was 23 June, which is about one month later than the standard date for egg-laying in the normal range of the kite (Parker 2009).

We infer from our observations and Wheeler (2003) that the kites might have attempted a nest elsewhere, had the nest fail, and moved to the school neighborhood, where they nested again, this time successfully. Parker (1999) reports that a pair may attempt to nest again after the loss of a single egg (citing Bent 1937).

Prior to this successful Rockford nest, it was suspected that Mississippi Kites nested near Quincy, Adams County, Illinois in the summer of 1992, when an adult was seen on several dates in June and July (Kleen 1993). An adult was also seen in Adams County on 22 July 1984 (Kleen 1995). Two juveniles were also reported from Adams County on 28 July 2007 (Bailey 2008).

Other northerly records

The Rockford nest record in northern Illinois is one of a series of Mississippi Kites nests that have been found more north and east of their traditional range in recent years. Nests were found southeast of Columbus, in south-central Ohio, in 2007 and the pair returned to nest in 2008. A second pair was discovered in the adjacent Athens County (McCormac and Boone 2009, in press). In 2008, two pairs nested in New Hampshire (McCormac and Boone 2009, in press), and another pair of kites nested



Above: An adult Mississippi Kite carries a monarch at Rockford (Winnebago County) on 9 September 2008.

Opposite page: A juvenile Mississippi Kite spreads its wings in Winnebago County on 21 September 2008.

in Connecticut (Retter 2008), where Mississippi Kites had also nested in 2005 and 2006 (McCormac and Boone 2009, in press).

Mississippi Kites are rare in the Winnebago County area, but their rate of occurrence has increased over the past 10 years, primarily as post-breeding vagrants. They are frequently seen near waterways, such as the adult that spent three weeks (26 July to 16 August 1998) near Pierce Lake and along Willow Creek at Rock Cut State Park, northeast of Rockford (Kleen 1999). Another was spotted there the following year, but only for two days, in August (J. Myers pers. comm.); yet another adult was seen there on 22 August 2004 (Stotz 2005). A single adult was at Blackhawk Springs Forest Preserve, southeast of Rockford, on the Illinois Statewide Spring Bird Count on 10 May 2003 (K. Kaltenbach pers. comm.) and Barbara Williams had an adult fly over our house, northwest of Rockford, on 9 July 2003, four days after a major wind storm and weather front came through on 5 July 2003 (Kleen 2004).

September sightings

As the juvenile became stronger, it was able to begin hunting for its own food. It was still seen catching its own food on 20 September, although it was also being fed by the

adults. In flight, the juvenile was distinctive and easily separated from the adults, with rich, reddish streaking on the under parts; large, white, irregular spots on the upper feather ends; and a brownish tail with three to four narrow white bands (see Wheeler 2003).

After 1 September, the third adult, one of the females, disappeared. As the days passed, the remaining two adults kept away from the nest area for longer time periods. On occasion, the juvenile would sit near the top of a tree and call repeatedly for quite some time before an adult would arrive with food. The two adults continued to feed the chick until at least 21 September, when the male was observed bringing a monarch butterfly to the juvenile. The last time either adult was seen was 21 September, and the last date that the juvenile was seen was 29 September. An interesting aspect of this species' presence in Rockford is the lateness of the departure date (especially from