

# Kansas Ornithological Society

## BULLETIN

PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

Vol. 41

September, 1990

No. 3

### WINTERING HAWKS ALONG A KANSAS ROADSIDE

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The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is a permanent resident in Kansas and most of the central plains (Johnsgard 1979). It is listed as a common resident of Lyon County and vicinity (Downs and Breukelman 1941), with increased numbers in Kansas in the winter (Goodrich 1946, Zimmerman and Patti 1988). Greatest winter concentrations are in the Central Feed, Grain, and Livestock land-resource region, located in eastern Oklahoma, northern Missouri and southern Iowa (Root 1988).

The Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) also is a permanent resident of Kansas and the central plains (Downs and Breukelman 1941, Goodrich 1946, Johnsgard 1979, Zimmerman and Patti 1988). The greatest winter concentrations of harriers occur in southwestern Texas and eastern New Mexico, with peak concentrations in the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, as well as in eastern Oklahoma, and in central Kansas, near the Quivira National Wildlife Refuge (Root 1988).

In contrast, Rough-legged Hawks (*Buteo lagopus*) are only winter residents of the central plains (Johnsgard 1979). The highest winter abundance occurs in the Great Basin and northern Great Plains with peak populations in Oregon, Utah, Montana, southwestern Colorado, and western Kansas (Root 1988).

The present data represent roadside counts of the above three species of wintering raptors obtained along Interstate-35 (I-35) between Ottawa and Emporia, Kansas during four days in late December, 1988.

#### Methods

Counting occurred on I-35 between the westernmost exit to Ottawa (Exit 182) and the K-99 exit (Exit 130) in Emporia. This distance is approximately 53 miles. All birds

**TABLE 1.**  
**NUMBER OF ROADSIDE RED-TAILED HAWKS (RTH), ROUGH-LEGGED HAWKS (RLH) AND NORTHERN HARRIERS (NOH) OBSERVED DURING LATE DECEMBER, 1988, ON INTERSTATE-35 BETWEEN OTTAWA AND EMPORIA, KANSAS**

Date	Approx. time	Approx. temp. F (wind)	Direction traveled	Number of hawks (notes)
25 Dec.	10:00	50's (calm)	West	28 rth
	16:00		East	29 rth, 1 rlh
26 Dec.	10:00	40's (windy)	West	15 rth, 1 rlh
	17:00		East	11 rth, 2 rlh
27 Dec.	12:00	30's (windy)	West	10 rth, 3 noh
	17:00		East	5 rth, 1 rlh
28 Dec.	14:00	20's (calm)	West	60 rth (1 dark-phase) 1 rlh, 1 noh

sighted in the air, or perched in trees or on fence posts along the interstate, were counted. The trips usually took about 50-60 minutes traveling within the normal speed limits (60-65 mph).

### Results and Discussion

The first trip was taken on Christmas morning, traveling west to Emporia (Table 1). During that morning the weather was clear with temperatures near the 50's F, and winds below about 15 mph. The number of hawks observed was not unusually high (28 birds), as we have often counted 20-30 hawks along this stretch during the past twelve winters we have regularly made the trip between the two cities. On the morning of 26 December fewer hawks were sighted, as was the case on the 27th as well. As the week progressed a cold front began moving from the north, as evidenced by the lower temperatures and stronger winds (> 15 mph). By 28 December, the front had moved through eastern Kansas and temperatures had dropped below freezing. Although there was no local snow, the front caused heavy snows in the upper central plains, which may have caused large numbers of hawks to move southward into the area, as 62 hawks were sighted in the early afternoon on 28 December.

In all cases slightly more than 50% of the hawks recorded were sighted between Ottawa and the junction of U.S. 75 (BETO junction), regardless of whether the trip was westward or eastward. The greater number of trees and the much wider area of mowed land between the road and the boundary fences enclosing the limited access highway likely account for these observations. Whether the roadsides between Ottawa and BETO junction have higher prey populations than those between BETO junction and Emporia is not known. The exceptionally unusual count in the early afternoon on 28 December was the highest count of hawks ever observed by the authors during the previous 12 years, although we had counted 50 or more hawks on several occasions. The size of the influx is even more surprising, considering the severe drought of the summer of 1988, which presumably reduced available prey. While observers in Kansas and Nebraska thought raptors were near normal, some birders in Oklahoma felt that raptors made a poor showing during the winter of 1988 (Grzybowski 1989). Southwestern Missouri observers tallied a concurrent, impressive influx of 198 red-tails into Barton and Vernon counties on 30 December 1988 (Peterjohn 1989).

The unusually warm weather pattern early in the week, coupled with the subsequent violent cold weather front likely was related to the marked increase of hawks into this area of Kansas. We were fortunate to have been in Kansas to chronicle the event. It is hoped that these data might serve as baseline data for other travelers of I-35 to compare as they venture along "Hawk Highway". This stretch of I-35 maintains one of the most remarkable and readily observable populations of wintering hawks in eastern Kansas.

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### BREEDING RECORD FOR THE BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE IN KANSAS

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On the morning of 6 August 1989, Gary Radke, of Olsburg, Kansas sighted an adult Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) approximately 2 miles west and 1.4 miles north

of Olsburg, Pottawatomie County, Kansas. Local birders were alerted, and the kite was observed later that afternoon by David Rintoul and on the evening of 7 August by Ted



**Figure 1. Black-shouldered Kites.**



**Figure 2. Female Black-shouldered Kite and young in nest.**

Cable. On 8 August 1989, Ted Cable and Mike Rader discovered that a second bird was in the area. Many birders arrived on the morning of 12 August to observe the birds, and after observing an adult for several hours a group of birders flushed the female from a well-concealed nest approximately 12 m off the ground in the top of a dense bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). The birds were observed regularly over subsequent weeks. The female was virtually always on the nest, leaving infrequently and only for 20-30 minutes at a time. Photographs of the adults were taken by Rintoul on 14 and 20 August (Figure 1). The two young were first sighted on 24 August by Jay Jeffery; therefore, hatching of the eggs occurred between 20-24 August. Rintoul photographed an adult feeding the young on 28 August and 7 September (Figure 2). On 8 September a series of severe thunderstorms passed through the area. Cable found extensive flooding in the area, and although both adults were still present, neither the nest nor young were seen. Searches of the area by several birders on 16-17 September revealed no sign of the nest, young, or adults. Cable searched the area in late autumn, after leaf-drop, and could find no remains of the nest or young.

The photographs are the first documentation of the occurrence and breeding of the Black-shouldered Kite in Kansas. During the mid-1800's this species nested as close to Kansas as the north edge of the Arbuckle Mountains near what is now the city of Davis, Oklahoma (Sutton 1967). During the first half of the 1900's the kite's range in the central U.S. was reduced to only the southernmost coastal counties in Texas (Sutton 1967). However, since the 1960's its range has expanded greatly and it is apparently one of the few raptors to have benefited from the expansion of agricultural land uses (Ehrlich, et al. 1988). Concurrent with the Black-shouldered Kite's range extension has been an increase in the number of extralimital records. Recent observations of this species have included records from North Dakota, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana (Mumford and Keller 1984, Lambeth 1988). The North Dakota record was of two adults and five young which apparently represented a family group that had nested in the area.

Often Black-shouldered Kites perennially return to the same nest site (Ehrlich, et al. 1988); therefore, this pair may return to Pottawatomie County. Regardless whether this specific pair returns, in light of their expanding range it is likely that in the near future there will be other Kansas records.

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