

A SIGHTING OF SQUARE-TAILED KITES AT NULLARBOR, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* has been recorded rarely in South Australia. This report of a sighting is from an area where the species was recorded by J. N. McGilp on 28 December 1931 when he saw one 40 km W of Nullarbor Station, another 48 km further west and a third bird 43 km E of Eucla (McGilp 1932).*

On 2 September 1982 in a cloudless sky at 11.30 three large raptors were observed adjacent to the Nullarbor motel (31°26'S, 130°54'E). When first seen they were approximately 100 m distant at 30 m height over a saltbush *Atriplex* sp. plain six kilometres west of a belt of eucalypt woodland to six metres height. Later one came directly overhead at approximately 20 m. We observed them for five minutes and they were identified as Square-tailed Kites on the basis of the following field notes taken during and immediately after the sighting.

Flight: Flapping and gliding mainly in medium circles and following a direct path.

Outline: Longish wings, medium length tail. Wings somewhat 'V'-ed in gliding, leading edge of wing bent back at wrist. Wing tips fingered. Tail tip straight across, neither indented nor curved, and with sharp side angles throughout period of observation in all three birds except one in which the tail had a central gap due to feather loss.

Plumage: Above: brown with a central grey-brown band along the centre of the wing. Below: brown with a rufous tinge to chest and abdomen, marked whitish windows at base of primaries (but less marked than those of the Black-breasted Buzzard *Hamirostra melanosternon*); slight bar-

ring of the trailing edge, otherwise no pattern on the underwing. Tail a lighter brown below with a narrow sub-terminal dark band.

Head: Forehead and face whitish, making a striking contrast with the crown and neck.

We are familiar with those raptors most likely to be confused with the Square-tailed Kite: Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Black-breasted Buzzard and Little Eagle *Hieraaeetus morphnoides*, and have made one other sighting of the Square-tailed Kite. That was of a bird at Salmon Gums, Western Australia, 880 km west of Nullarbor on 7 October 1982. It made a swoop just above treetops 90 m distant displaying the features noted above, but showing somewhat more upswept wings and a darker leading edge to the wings.

McGilp (1932) commented on his sightings: "There is no doubt about the bird when once seen". For us, the following features distinguish the species: whitish windows unlinked by any pale transverse band, a persistently "square-cut" tail, longish wings and medium length tail, a bent leading edge to the wings, some upsweep of the wings when gliding and a strikingly, and readily visible at some distance, whitish forehead and face.

REFERENCE

McGilp, J. N. 1932. Birds of the Nullarbor Plain and the Far West Coast of South Australia. S. Aust. Orn. 11: 146-147.

* *The status of the Square-tailed Kite in South Australia is not well understood. A review of all South Australian records is forthcoming in this journal.* — Ed.