

SQUARE-TAILED KITES NESTING ON THE UPPER MURRAY RIVER IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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The Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* is regarded as a rare bird in South Australia (e.g. Condon 1969). There are very few reports of the birds nesting in the State and little is known of their habits. On 30 September 1982, I located a nesting pair on the upper Murray River.*

OBSERVATIONS

At approximately 0745 while travelling along the Murray River by boat, I observed a medium-sized raptor hunting through the canopy of a large stand of Red Gums *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* near the river bank. The bird was being harassed by White-rumped Miners *Manorina flavigula*. I viewed it for several seconds from approximately 10 metres with binoculars. I immediately noticed the upswept wings and, as it banked, the whitish face indicative of *L. isura* (see Plate 1).

In the company of my wife Sue and Mr M. Rohrlach, I went ashore near where I had last seen the bird. When approximately 120 metres into the trees adjacent to the bank I again sighted the bird. It soared directly overhead, above the canopy, then alighted on a large stick nest approximately 30 metres away. The nest was situated on a horizontal fork, approximately 20 metres above ground level and was of untidy construction. As we walked closer to the nest tree, two adult *L. isura* flew from the nest; both returned some minutes later, one carrying a stick. The female (the larger of the two), was then observed sitting on the nest and occasionally adjusting sticks on its perimeter. The wings, which projected well beyond the tail as is characteristic of the species, could be seen clearly from below.

The birds were observed for three hours during which time the male, at regular intervals, would land near the nest, stay for some minutes, then fly off again.

On 15 October 1982 my wife and I returned to the area with Mr L. Cupper. Both adult kites were sighted, the female sitting on the nest almost continuously while the male was often absent. Subsequent visits produced similar observations with no sightings of prey being brought to the nest or any other indications of the presence of nestlings.

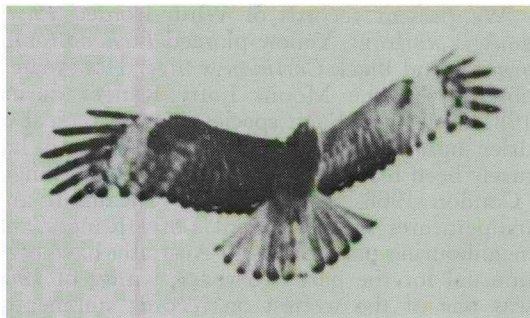


Plate 1. Square-tailed Kite on the upper Murray, South Australia showing features of underwing and tail patterns and pale head. Photo: T. Fraser.

A final visit in early December 1982 found the nest vacated and only one adult bird in the area. Due to the scarcity of droppings and castings below the nest, together with the extended period in which the female sat, it can be assumed that the eggs failed to hatch.

DISCUSSION

This particular pair of Kites may have been in the area for some time for a similar nest to the one studied was in close proximity.

In Queensland, *L. isura* has been recorded feeding young on the nestlings of White-rumped Miners and Little Friarbirds *Philemon citreogularis* (L. Cupper, pers. comm.), both of which are common in the area of the nest described here.

My observations of the Kites on the upper Murray consistently working above and through the tree canopy while in search of prey led me to the opinion that this species requires tall open forest to suit its mode of hunting.

**It is felt that the suppression of the exact locality of these observations is justifiable as a means of reducing possible pressures on this rare species.—Ed.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCE

Condon, H. T. 1969. A Handlist of the Birds of South Australia. Third Edition. South Australian Ornithological Association: Adelaide.