

MISSISSIPPI KITE FOUND IMPALED ON YUCCA PLANT

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**Abstract**—On 20 June 2005, I found a Mississippi Kite impaled on a soapweed yucca in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the bird impaled itself while alive rather than falling into the plant postmortem.

Due to their predatory lifestyle, raptors often sustain injuries during pursuit (Roth et al. 2002, Naldo and Samour 2004). However, Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) collisions with stationary objects are rarely reported (Parker 1999). On 20 June 2005, I found an adult Mississippi Kite impaled on a soapweed yucca plant (*Yucca glauca*) in northwestern Cimarron County, Oklahoma. The bird was not stuck on the outer portions of the leaves but was lodged near the base. It was pierced through by 2–3 yucca leaves, and the neck was bent back to an extent suggesting it was broken by the collision (Fig. 1). The location of the kite on the yucca suggested that it had collided with the plant at an angle of approximately 45° with respect to the ground. The bird was too desiccated to necropsy.

I found the kite in a glade along a dry creek bed heavily lined with cottonwoods (*Populus deltoids*). There were other Mississippi Kites in the area, and the dead bird was <50 m from a kite nest, at which no bird was seen on this or a subsequent visit on 23 June 2005.



**Fig. 1.** Mississippi Kite impaled on a soapweed yucca plant in Northwestern Cimarron County, Oklahoma, 20 June 2005. Photograph by S. McConnell.

The circumstances of the mortality event can only be surmised. It would take considerable force to drive the bird all the way into the base of the plant and possibly break the neck. This, along with the fact that the bird was impaled at an angle that would have precluded its having fallen onto the plant from above after dying, suggested that the bird flew into the plant. It might have been chasing a prey item and crashed into the yucca after an evasive move by the pursued, or simply pursued a fleeing prey item into the plant. Alternatively, the bird might have been pursued itself, during an intraspecific encounter, or by another raptor; there was an active Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) nest <1 km away. The yucca was in a sheltered area not subject to a sudden wind gust that could have blown the bird into the plant. The general area was extremely remote (1 semi-occupied dwelling in the township, with similar densities in contiguous townships), so it seems unlikely that someone shot the bird, carried it into the glade and impaled it on the plant.

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**Oklahoma's First Winter Bird Atlas Project produces two new Mew Gull records.**—The Mew Gull (*Larus canus*) is a relatively new bird for Oklahoma. The first record for the state was a single adult located by J. Arterburn on 25 January 2002 (Arterburn 2002, 2004). Since then, there have been 3 additional accepted records for Oklahoma. M. Oliphant located a second adult individual on 16 December 2002, which was subsequently photographed by J. Gryzbowski and accepted by Oklahoma Birds Record Committee (OBRC) in 2003 (Arterburn 2004). The 2 remaining reports occurred during the first Oklahoma Winter Bird Atlas Project (D. Reinking unpubl. data). Both observations represent new county records. We provide notes from both records and comment on this species' potential future in the state.

On 4 February 2004, D. Tozer found a single adult Mew Gull at the Canton Reservoir in Blaine County, Oklahoma. The individual was located on a rocky break wall near a Canadian Recreation Area boat ramp. Other *Larus* species present were Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*), Herring (*L. argentatus*), and Bonaparte's (*L.*

*Philadelphia*) gulls, all of which were abundant (unpubl. field notes of D. Tozer). Photo documentation was officially accepted by the OBRC in 2005 (Arterburn 2005).

The final year of the Winter Bird Atlas (2007–2008) provided the most recent record of Mew Gull for the state. E. Beck located a single adult at the Kerr Reservoir lock and dam on 27 December 2007. It was also present on 28 December, when it was viewed by multiple observers. The bird was located in a large flock of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls that were taking advantage of a water release that subsequently provided an influx of fish of unknown identity. A local fisherman suggested that most of the fish were shad (family Clupeidae). Photo documentation was obtained, and the record is currently in review with the OBRC.

As in other neighboring states such as Kansas and Texas where Mew Gull records are more numerous (Arterburn 2002), observers in Oklahoma might expect more observations of this species in the future by paying careful attention to conditions consistent with documented records. In 3 observations (Tozer unpub. data, Arterburn 2002, and this one), Mew Gulls were located within large flocks of Ring-billed and Bonaparte's gulls that appear to be associating with the presence of either dense schools of fish that are churned during large dam releases or fish die offs. Thus, Mew Gulls should be looked for in such associations, paying special attention to bill size and shape, mantle color, and the species' large white windows on the outer primaries, P9 and P10 (Moskoff and Bevier 2002).

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**First nesting attempt by White-faced Ibis in eastern Oklahoma.**—We documented the first nesting attempt of White-faced Ibis (*Plegadis chihi*) in eastern

Oklahoma. During late spring and summer 2007, a 6.5-ha wading-bird nesting rookery was observed in a 29.5-ha impoundment (R. Bastarache, pers. comm.) at Red Slough Wildlife Management Area (WMA), about 8 km south of Haworth, McCurtain County. The rookery was located over water in black willow (*Salix nigra*) that averaged about 5 m in height, with a few buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) around the perimeter.

On 30 May 2007, Arbour observed a pair of White-faced Ibis sitting in a buttonbush, pulling at limbs. The following day, the birds were building a nest in the buttonbush with the male bringing sticks and pennywort (*Hydrocotyle*) to the female, who added the materials to the nest. On 2 June, Heck observed 1 ibis sitting on the nest about 1 m above the water. Arbour observed a pair of ibis in the buttonbush 4 June. It is not known if any eggs were laid by the Ibis. On 9 June, Heck could find no sign of the ibis but observed a female Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) sitting in the nest and a male perched above. Later observations indicated no further use of the nest by ibis or grackles. No White-faced Ibis were observed subsequently in the rookery or at Red Slough WMA through the end of July 2007.

White-faced Ibis nesting was first documented in Oklahoma in a large wading-bird rookery at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Alfalfa County, in summer 1995 (Sheppard, R. S. 1996. White-faced Ibis nest at Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge, Oklahoma. *Bulletin of the Oklahoma Ornithological Society* 29:1–2). A. E. Versaw (Reinking, D. L., ed. 2004. Oklahoma Breeding Bird Atlas. Univ. Oklahoma Press, Norman) reported “confirmed breeding” for Kingfisher and Caddo counties.

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