

## White-tailed Kite in Western North Carolina

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On Friday 23 July 1993 the authors were birding at the Shining Rock Wilderness Area, Haywood County, NC when we sighted an adult White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) near the parking lot at the end of Forest Road 816, in an area called Flat Laurel Creek.

We had stopped to overlook the valley just east of the parking lot, at 1030 h. The valley is open, grassy, with scattered shrubs and trees including a dozen tall dead snags. The weather was clear, with blue sky, scattered clouds and a light haze in the distance. Temperature was about 80° F.

We were scanning the area, looking south and west, with Zeiss 7x42 Dialyt and Bushnell Custom 7x35 binoculars when a very pale, ghostly raptor appeared from the west. It sailed towards us and dipped to explore the valley below. At that point, as we looked down on the moving bird, we saw that it had long pointed (falcon-shaped) wings, and a long tail. The bird was much larger than a kestrel, appearing to be approximately peregrine-sized. The crown, back and wings were pale gray and the tail was even paler, almost white as we looked from above; and we were struck immediately by the sight of two inky-black triangles at the forward bend of the wings.

The bird eventually lit on the very top of a tall snag, facing us. Head-on, it appeared all white, with yellow legs. When it moved its head, which it did from time to time, we caught sight of a black line through the eye, or from the base of the bill to the eye. At this point, the bird was approximately 400 ft from where we stood. When it dipped its head downward toward its breast, we could clearly see that the crown was pearl-gray, contrasting with the white on the face and breast.

It remained perched for five minutes, then took off again. It rose slightly and hovered, like a kestrel; then it flew a short distance and hovered again for a few seconds. It did not go after any prey, however. It then rose higher, so that for the first time it was above our heads. From the underneath it looked all white on the body and tail. We both noticed a gray wash near the tip of the pointed wings, and Bill Siebenheller saw small black marks at the bend in the wing.

The bird did not flap much but rather appeared to glide or sail away from us, going west. It gradually distanced itself from our position until it disappeared into the mists of the western hills.

We had watched it, all told, for about ten minutes. On the basis of all we had seen we concluded that it was an adult White-tailed Kite.

We remained where we were for a few minutes, then walked to our car where we made notes on what we had just seen. We scanned the skies to the west of the parking lot, hoping to see the bird again, but it did not appear. Along with many other birders we returned to the area the following day, 24 July, but the kite was not seen again.

We had seen a White-tailed Kite once before, at Bentsen State Park in Texas in November 1992. That bird was also an adult and exhibited the same distinctive markings we saw on this bird.

The White-tailed Kite has been described by Potter et al (1980) as a "very rare accidental" in the Carolinas. Pearson et al (1959) list one sight record, in Davie County, from 1946. An early sighting was reported in *The Chat* (21:70-71). More recently, color photographs taken at Fort Fisher, New Hanover County, NC on 8 April by Clyde Sorenson were deposited in the NCSM Bird Photo files (Nos. 130, 131,132, 137-145, 270). A 1992 sighting by Eric Dean, with photographs, has been reported but not yet published at this writing.

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#### LITERATURE CITED

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