

Black-shouldered Kite

By: V. Arnold Smith

There were a few high, wispy clouds, but the sun was shining warmly the morning of April 18, 1992. It was past 7:30 a.m. when ten of us (bird watchers of the Wasatch Audubon Society) straggled from the Lytle Ranch campground (owned by BYU and located in southwest corner of Utah).

We followed the road toward the irrigation pond which lies on the north end of the property. Dr. Douglas C. Cox, assistant director of the BYU MLB Museum, was camped on the north side of the ranch house and as we passed by he came out carrying a 40X telescope. Dr. Cox joined our group as we were glassing a few common birds on the north end of the orchard. Most of us had our attention on a Lark Sparrow when, about 7:55 a.m. someone in the party ask "What is that white bird?"

There in the orchard setting in one of the old fruit trees was a medium sized bird of prey, which appeared basically pure white and was feeding on what we believe may have been a Pocket Gopher. My first thought, based on logic of what can normally be found in the area, was that the bird it had to be a young owl and I voiced the idea. My suggestion was quickly rejected because of the very smooth white body and head, black/grey on the wings and red eyes. The group moved to the east into the orchard to a better vantage point, probably somewhere between 120 to 150 feet from the bird. It didn't take the group long to eliminate the

possibilities down to one. It was determined that it had to be a Black-shouldered Kite, a bird which was well out of its normal range.

While the others were viewing the Kite through the telescope Dr. Cox had brought along, I decided I would run back to my tent to get my telephoto camera.

I returned in a few minutes at which time Keith Evans, president of Wasatch Audubon, and my self tried to obtain a photograph. We snapped a couple but when we tried to get a bit closer the Kite decided to move. It flew about 150 to 200 yards southeast to a Joshua tree located on the hill just east of the ranch house where it landed briefly, then continued its flight on out of sight. The Black-shouldered Kite left its perch in the center of the orchard between 8:10 and 8:15 a.m.

The observers not mentioned above included Jack Rensel (Wildlife Resources), Mindy Boehm, Barbara Faigle, Carol Neumann, John and Fay Noe and Jim and Joyce Peters.
