

**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.*