

HAWK

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Ferruginous Hawk. Photo: Vic Berardi

Scanning The Ridge

This summer has seen some interesting indications of possible changes in raptor distribution here in the north-east. Back in May a report was posted on the New Hampshire bird listserv that most (including myself) ignored and assumed was a misidentification. Someone, who's name I did not recognize, reported a pair of Mississippi Kites near Newmarket, NH. How silly is that? (!)

A few weeks later another birder (who I knew to be reputable) reported, yes you've guessed it, a pair of Mississippi Kites on a suburban street in Newmarket. Suddenly the birding world was a buzz and everyone was flocking to see the birds.

To everyone's amazement, the pair started carrying twigs to a large maple tree in someone's driveway right along a busy street. Surely they weren't planning on nesting in New Hampshire? Well, nest they did. Many watched as the pair copulated and the male offered his female sticks. It turns out there were three kites -- an adult pair and a 1st-year "helper" (perhaps this was not the first year this pair had nested here and their chick from last year was back to help raise it's siblings).

The human residents of the street were eager to learn about the local avian celebrities that brought so many optic-weilding strangers from many different states. Hundreds spied them as they started incubating and then started brooding a chick and then -- with the assistance of the third -- started feeding the chick on dragonflies. As I write this column, the chick is just days from fledging.

A few weeks ago I heard news that a pair of kites had successfully fledged a chick at a nest in Connecticut! Clearly something is changing here. Is this a sign of a warming climate? Can we expect a major range expansion of this beautiful bird throughout the north-east. I for one will be extra vigilant this fall to see if any kites pass over my hawkwatch site in New Hampshire.

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Photo: Maynard Wheeler

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In This Issue:

Scanning The Ridge by Iain MacLeod.....	1
HMANA Officers, Directors, Committees and Staff	2
HMANA 2010 Conference	2
Turbine Guidelines Committee	2
HMANA Winter Raptor Surveys	3
HMANA Raptor-a-thon	4
The State of North American Birds of Prey published	5
Gunsight Raptor Tour.....	6
Color Morph Distribution in the Rough-legged Hawk at Derby Hill, Mexico, New York, Spring 2007 by John van Dort.....	7-9
South Dakota's Raptor Bonanza by Vic Berardi	10-13
Swainson's Hawk Observatory: Aldo Contreras' Own Achievement! by Norma Ferriz.....	14
Eastern Flyway Report by Seth Kellogg	15-29
Central Flyway Report by Vic Berardi	30-46
Western Flyway Report by Fred Tilly	47-56
Gulf/Caribbean Report by Eileen Muller Guerra	57-59
Pacific Flyway Report by Fran McDermott	60-67
Data Use Policy	68
Membership Form	68
HawkCount.....	68