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First record of a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) in the Dominican Republic

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Photo: Roberta Davidson



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Abstract The Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) is a long distance migrant that breeds in North America and winters in South America. During fall and spring migration, they congregate in large flocks and follow the Mesoamerican Land Corridor and have not been recorded in the Caribbean region. On the evening of 15 February 2013 at Punta Cana in southeastern Dominican Republic, we observed a juvenile Mississippi Kite perched above the tree canopy.

Keywords Dominican Republic, first record, *Ictinia mississippiensis*, Mississippi Kite

Resumen Primer registro de *Ictinia mississippiensis* en la República Dominicana—*Ictinia mississippiensis* es un migrante de larga distancia que cría en Norteamérica e inverna en Sudamérica. Durante las migraciones de otoño y primavera se congregan en grandes bandos que siguen el corredor terrestre mesoamericano y no han sido registrados en la región del Caribe. En la noche del 25 de febrero de 2013 observamos un juvenil de *Ictinia mississippiensis* posado por encima del dosel del bosque en Punta Cana al sudeste de la República Dominicana.

Palabras clave *Ictinia mississippiensis*, República Dominicana, primer registro

Résumé Première mention de Milan du Mississippi (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) en République Dominicaine—Le Milan du Mississippi (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) est un migrateur longue distance qui niche en Amérique du Nord et hiverne en Amérique du Sud. Pendant la migration d'automne et de printemps, ces milans se réunissent en larges groupes et suivent le corridor biologique méso-américain, et l'espèce n'a jamais été mentionnée dans la région caribéenne. Le soir du 15 février 2013 à Punta Cana au sud-est de la République Dominicaine, un Milan du Mississippi juvénile a été observé au-dessus de la canopée.

Mots-clés *Ictinia mississippiensis*, Milan du Mississippi, première mention, République Dominicaine

Mississippi Kites (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) are complete trans-equatorial migrants that breed in North America and spend the boreal winter in South America (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001, Bildstein 2006). In the United States, these kites breed from eastern to southern states, along the central states of the Mississippi River, and into the western states of Colorado and Arizona (Wheeler and Clark 1995, Parker 1999, Wheeler 2003). From late August through early October, Mississippi Kites congregate in large migration flocks and leave the United States to migrate along the Mesoamerican Land Corridor (Central America), ultimately arriving in South America where they disperse into winter ranges from 11°S to 32°S latitude (Parker 1999, Areta and Seipke 2006, Juhant and Areta 2013). For the northward spring migration, kites have been observed departing Argentina during mid- to late February (~10,000 kites seen

flying northwards; Areta and Seipke 2006, Juhant and Areta 2013); and from the eastern lowlands of Bolivia during early to mid-March (~4,000 kites moving north; Olivo 2007). Most other Mississippi Kite northward migration records come from counts and observations of flocks flying low and rapidly through Central America: passing through Panama in late March and early April, through Mexico in April to early May, and arriving to breeding areas in United States from May to June (Wetmore 1965, Thiollay 1979, Parker 1988).

On 15 February 2013 from 1730–1800, a kite was observed by TH perched approximately 3 m above the canopy at Punta Cana, Dominican Republic (18°32'N, 68°22'W; Fig. 1). It was identified as a juvenile Mississippi Kite by the dark brown streaking on its breast and underparts, and pale superciliary line. Also, the wingtips extending to the tail tip is a characteristic of Mississippi Kites. The bird appeared to be resting while perched above the canopy.

Field guides for the West Indies and Caribbean do not list and have not documented the Mississippi Kite in this region (Raffaele *et al.* 1998, Latta *et al.* 2006). There are several records of Mississippi Kites in the western Caribbean region during fall (Norton *et*

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al. 2003, Rodríguez-Santana 2010) and spring (Burke *et al.* 2000, Mazar Barnett *et al.* 2005, Kirwan *et al.* 2009) migration, but this is the first record for a Mississippi Kite in the Dominican Republic and the central Caribbean region during the non-migratory period (boreal winter). Most Mississippi Kites are on their wintering grounds in South America during early February and may be just beginning their northbound spring migration from these wintering grounds by mid-February (Areta and Seipke 2006, Juhant and Areta 2013). Parker (1988) suggested that some early arrivals to Florida during spring migration may be crossing the Gulf of Mexico instead of following the Mesoamerican Land Corridor, a migratory flight path that could include the western Caribbean region. This suggests that this individual was a young bird that overwintered in South America and migrated north to Hispaniola. The observed juvenile Mississippi Kite could have been following a trans-Gulf northward migratory trajectory toward Florida, with a stop-over in the Dominican Republic.

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Fig. 1. A juvenile Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) perched at Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, on 15 February 2013.

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