

20 DEC. 1990

DEAR ELLA ~

I JUST GOT YOUR NOTE TODAY, & THOUGHT I SHOULD GIVE YOU A SHOCK BY BEING CONSCIENTIOUS FOR ONCE AND ANSWERING RIGHT AWAY —

TO GET THE PHOTOS OUT OF THE WAY FIRST, THE BIRD IS ABSOLUTELY A YOUNG BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE. AS FOR WHAT THE OBSERVER SAW ON IT, ALL I CAN SAY IS THAT IT CAN BE REALLY HARD TO SEE TAIL COLOUR ON THESE BIRDS WHEN THEY'RE PERCHED — AND SOMETIMES WHEN THEY'RE FLYING AS WELL. I'VE OFTEN SEEN THIS SPECIES LOOKING VERY DARK IN FLIGHT OVERHEAD. ANYWAY, I.D. OF YOUNG MISSISSIPPI VS. BLACK-SHOULDERED KITES SEEMS TO BE TREATED REALLY POORLY IN THE FIELD GUIDES; BUT IN A COUPLE OF THESE PHOTOS YOU CAN SEE THAT THE UNDERPARTS ON THIS BIRD ARE BASICALLY WHITISH, WITH A CINNAMON SUFFUSION DOWN THE CENTER. ANY MISSISSIPPI YOUNG ENOUGH TO HAVE DARK ON THE HEAD (AS THIS BIRD HAS) WOULD SHOW OBVIOUS STRIPING ON THE UNDERPARTS. THE POSITION & EXTENT OF THE CINNAMON WASH APPEAR TO BE EXACTLY AS TYPICAL FOR BLACK-SHOULDERED IN ITS FIRST AUTUMN. ANOTHER POINT IS THE HEAD PATTERN, WITH A DARK AREA GOING ACROSS THE BACK OF THE CROWN & THEN EXTENDING DOWN THE NAPE. THIS IS TYPICAL OF YOUNG BLACK-SHOULDERED. HEAD PATTERN IN FIRST-AUTUMN MISSISSIPPI IS VARIABLE, BUT THE DARKEST AREAS WILL ALWAYS INCLUDE THE EAR-COVERTS, WHICH LOOK VERY PALE ON THE BIRD IN THE PHOTO. FINALLY, ALTHOUGH THIS IS A "SOFT" CRITERION, THE BIRD'S SHAPE AND POSTURE LOOK TYPICAL OF BLACK-SHOULDERED TO ME — I WOULD GUESS IT TO BE THIS SPECIES EVEN IF THE PHOTOS WERE SILHOUETTES.



(Kenn Kaufman)