

First dark-morph Hook-Billed Kite fledged in the United States

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The first known nesting of a dark-morph Hook-billed Kite (*Chondrohierax unicinctus*) in the United States occurred in the Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in 2002 (Clark 2002). While leading the field trip in the same park for a World Birding Center raptor identification workshop on the morning of 6 October 2002, I located a dark-morph juvenile (Figures 1 and 2) that was attended by a dark-morph adult female, presumably the same female as reported earlier (cf. Clark 2002).

In the course of the workshop, I had shown my group the tree where this dark female had placed her first nest. This nest had not been added to and consisted still of just a few sticks. We walked to another area where I had previously seen flying and perched Hook-billed Kites, as there was a high density of tree snails (*Euglandina*), the kites' preferred food. When we had walked about 300 m from the first nest, we heard an alarm call, a typical call given by adult Hook-billed Kites when they have fledged youngsters. I led the group off the road

about 30 m into the woods toward the vocalizations, where we located the perched dark-morph adult female. The adult was easy to find, as she was calling loudly and often. After the female saw that we could see her, she flew back a short distance out of sight. I alerted the group that she may have juveniles and asked all to look for them. Several of my group spotted two perched youngsters, one of which was a dark morph. We observed the dark bird through our telescopes and noted that it differed from the adult female by having brownish eyes (Figure 2). The other chick was a typical light-morph juvenile. We left this area and hoped that they would fly so that we could see them better. After a while, the juvenile dark morph flew directly over us and circled. I was able to get a photograph of it in flight (Figure 1).

Note that the juvenile differs from the adult female by having several rows of white spots in the flight feathers; the flight feathers of the adult female are mostly uniformly dark, with a few white spots on the primaries (cf. Clark 2002). We also had better looks through our telescopes at the dark adult female and the light juvenile perched together in a mesquite tree.

I saw the dark juvenile several times in the same area for two months after that. I was able to take a digiscoped photograph of it perched (Figure 2). I have not seen this bird in the area since that time; presumably it has dispersed to another area.

These observations constitute the first record of the fledging of a dark-morph Hook-billed Kite in the United States. This is also the first

time that Hook-billed Kites have been reported to nest twice (double brood) during a breeding season. The pair presumably used a different nest for the second brood. The adult male paired with this dark female is clearly heterozygous, as the dark-morph gene is recessive (Clark 2002). The light-morph chick is thus also heterozygous.

Acknowledgments

I thank the World Birding Center, especially Sean Smith and Brad McKinney, for sponsoring the raptor identification course.

Literature cited

Clark, W. S. 2002. First nesting of dark-morph Hook-billed Kite in the United States. *North American Birds* 56: 260-262.



Figure 1. Dark-morph juvenile Hook-billed Kite. Note the rows of pale spotting on the undersides of the flight feathers. Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. October 2002. Photograph by William S. Clark.

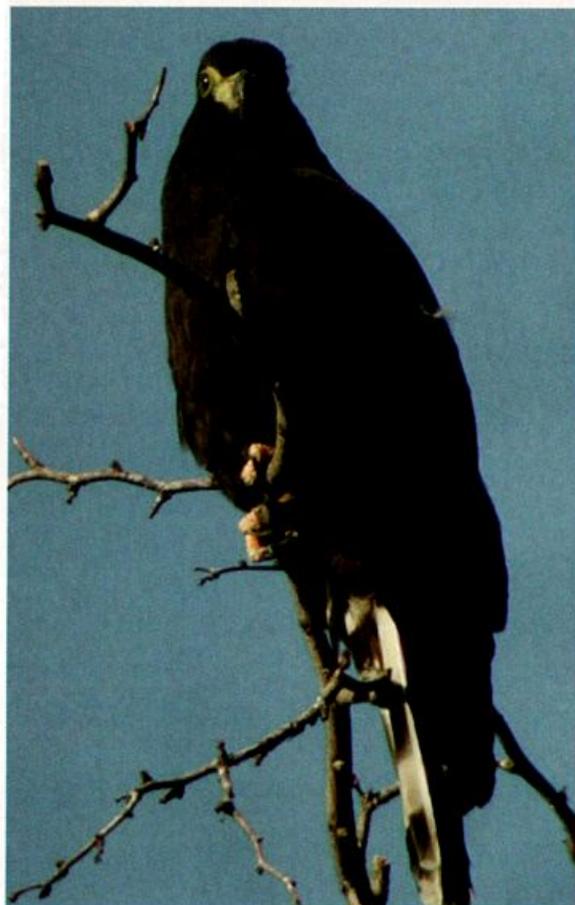


Figure 2. Dark-morph juvenile Hook-billed Kite. Note the brownish eyes. Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park. November 2002. Photograph by William S. Clark.