

Square-tailed Kite in the Northern Territory

Storr (1967, *List of Northern Territory birds*) included the Square-tailed Kite *Lophoictinia isura* only among *species confirmandae* with the comment; 'Most of the seven records are unconvincing and almost certainly refer to *Milvus*. The least dubious is that of Kearland (1896, [*Victorian Nat.* 13: 58-63]), who received from Central Australia an addled egg and the wing of a fully fledged juvenile from the same nest.' He also drew our attention to another possible record by Boehm (1947, *S. Aust. Orn.* 18: 68-70) who comments for the species; 'Two eggs, Finke River, August 17, 1897, C. E. Cowle collector. In South Australian Museum. May however have been actually taken in Northern Territory.' It is tolerably certain that observers have often misidentified the Fork-tailed Kite *Milvus migrans* as *Lophoictinia*, e.g. Roff (1967, *Emu* 66: 273-278) who recorded flocks of up to 53 *L. isura* on Cape York, but not a single sighting of *M. migrans*. *L. isura* probably never occurs in flocks of any size.

During a survey of the Sir Edward Pellew Group, Gulf of Carpentaria a male Square-tailed Kite was collected on 5 July 1966 and an immature female on 26 July 1967, both on Southwest Island, the island nearest to Port McArthur. They measured (mm) and weighed (gm) as follows: ♂ (Reg. No. 853), wing 445, tail 235, tarsus 48, bill from cere 23, length in flesh 498, weight 501; ♀ (Reg. No. 6822), wing 477, tail 255, tarsus 53, bill from cere 23, length in flesh 555, weight 590. Colours of soft parts were: iris light brown (♂), hazel (♀); cere pinkish-white (♂), white (♀); bill blue-grey tipped blackish (♂), upper mandible base grey, rest blackish-grey, lower mandible blue-grey, tipped black (♀); feet brownish-black (♂), cream-yellow (♀); claws black. The female was very pale sandy-buff on the crown and hind-neck, much lighter than the male, with only a suggestion of its heavier darker markings on the nape.

The photograph (Plate 3) of the female shows the long wings, erectile head feathers and the long thigh feathers and is, we believe, the first of a live bird. It was shot and wounded flying over rather open dry forest of *Acacia*, *Grevillea* and *Pandanus* with sparse ground cover of tussock and other grasses. The stomach contained scales, bones and claws of a skink (Lacertilia: Scincidae), remains of two ants, one grasshopper, two beetles (1 Curculionidae) and woody plant material (identifications by W. J. M. Vestjens, CSIRO Div. Wildl. Res.). We have been unable to find any other specimens of this species from the Northern Territory in Australian museums. We acknowledge gratefully financial and logistic support in the surveys from Mt Isa Mines Ltd.

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