



Press Release

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White-tailed Kite Is Spotted Sunday Morning Near Stratford Point And Is Still There: *The First-Ever Recorded Sighting in CT!*

A White-tailed Kite has “wandered” into Connecticut and was first spotted by birdwatcher Dennis Varza on Sunday morning (Aug. 1) at 8 a.m. from Short Beach while Dennis was looking in the direction of Stratford Point. Within an hour, Dennis had spread the news via e-mail to much of the online Connecticut birding community, and soon thereafter the first wave of visitors arrived (eventually totaling hundreds) from several states, and they’re still coming.

What’s all the excitement about? “This is the first sighting in Connecticut and one of only two that we know of from New England,” said Frank Gallo, CAS Coastal Center Associate Director. “We’re checking into other records. Right now, we’ve heard of one from New York, one from Cape May in New Jersey, and a possible sighting in Pennsylvania. There is supposed to be a documented record for Massachusetts, which would be the only other one for New England.”

The White-tailed Kite normally occurs in the West and Southwestern continental U.S.; it can be found year-round in Mexico, California, along the east coast of Texas and the tip of Florida. In winter it may fly as far north as Washington State.

Connecticut Audubon Society’s Scott Kruitbosch was one of the first to arrive on the scene; here’s excerpts that he posted to our CAS bog (and attached are photos taken by Scott and CAS Coastal Center Associate Director Frank Gallo):

“This morning [August 1] around 8AM, birdwatcher Dennis Varza spotted a White-tailed Kite from Short Beach in Stratford looking at our own Stratford Point! [Where Connecticut Audubon Society staff has been conducting science and conservation research for DuPont at the site of the former Remington Arms Gun Club.] He got the word out to the CT email birding list in the 9 o’clock hour -- thank you Dennis! Charlie Barnard and I headed down there as fast as we could. Charlie arrived a couple minutes before I did, and he found it flying over the back field of the Point as I frantically ran from my car to see it. We ran around even more to obtain record photos in case it departed. Thankfully, the bird stuck around for hundreds of visitors from multiple states. I was there until after 6Pm. It was at Stratford Point for most of today, though it also visited Frash Pond, the airport, and the landfill behind Short Beach. It certainly seems to enjoying hunting all over both IBAs [Important Birding Areas]. This will be a first state record, and there are very few records anywhere in the northeastern part of the nation. Congratulations to Dennis!”

“The experts don’t know for certain if the White-tailed Kite is a ‘migratory’ or a ‘nomadic’ bird,” said Milan Bull, CAS Senior Director of Science & Conservation, as he observed the bird from Stratford Point. “The difference is that migratory species travel regular routes, while nomadic birds wander and are not predictable in their flight patterns. How did the White-tailed Kite get to Connecticut, so far from its usual stomping grounds? I believe it wandered here. And it’s this kind of occurrence that keeps birdwatchers endlessly fascinated and on their toes. You just never know what you are going to find. Sometimes these rarities are blown to Connecticut by storms and sometimes they simply wander here, and I think in the case of this White-tailed Kite, it’s a wanderer. What a great bird!”

Please check Connecticut Audubon Society’s blog for more updates and photos **plus a 1:22-minute-long video of the White-tailed Kite flying and diving and being chased away by Common Terns, shot by CAS’s Scott Kruitbosch:** <http://ctaudubon.blogspot.com/>. Attached is also possibly the first photo ever taken of a White-tailed Kite in Connecticut, shot by Scott Kruitbosch.

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