

# THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

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Mississippi  
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# THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

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# THE MISSISSIPPI KITE

*The Mississippi Kite* is a biannual periodical published by the Mississippi Ornithological Society to record and further the study of Mississippi birdlife.

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COVER IMAGE: Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)  
pen and ink drawing by David A. Cimprich.

## HARRIS'S SPARROW (*ZONOTRICHIA QUERULA*) RECORDS IN ATTALA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

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On 3 December 2004, I was taking my usual morning bird walk when I noted Field Sparrows feeding in a weedy patch behind our barn. As I stood there watching them, a large sparrow popped up to the top of a weed in front of me. I noted a black throat and immediately recognized it as an adult Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*). I knew this bird because an immature Harris's Sparrow had visited my feeder and patio in 2002. The immature bird stayed only two days, but James Sanders and Terry Schiefer did see it and verified its identity. The 2002 bird was a new bird record for Attala County. I did quite a bit of research on this species, for it was also a new bird for me.

This adult Harris's Sparrow was a welcome visitor. Later that day it came to the picnic table where I spread mixed bird feed for my local winter birds – Northern Cardinals (*Cardinalis cardinalis*), Dark-eyed Juncos (*Junco hyemalis*), American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*), etc. It returned again the next morning, and it stayed around our yard the whole winter.

The Harris's Sparrow was not shy or secretive. It was easily seen by many Mississippi birders who visited my home. It was viewed in the trees and shrubs and on the patio and feeders.

It was still here on 18 April 2005. Then I left for a few days, and when I returned it was gone--migrating north to its breeding grounds in Canada, I suppose. It was a real treat to have this unusual visitor, and I also enjoyed the more than 50 birders who came to see it. Two of the visitors were John and Marion

Fahnestock of Ocean Springs. During their visit John took the photo of the Harris's Sparrow shown below in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Adult Harris's Sparrow at Henne residence, Attala County, Mississippi. Photographed 29 December 2004 by John Fahnestock.

**REVIEW OF HARRIS'S SPARROW (*ZONOTRICHIA QUERULA*)  
RECORDS IN MISSISSIPPI**

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Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*) nests in north central Canada in stunted boreal forests where the northern taiga forest meets the tundra. Its breeding areas are so remote that a nest of the species was not discovered until 1931. In winter, Harris's Sparrow can be found regularly in the central plains states from southern South Dakota south to Texas and east to western Arkansas and northwestern Louisiana (Kaufman 1996). Mississippi, where the species is of casual occurrence, lies at the periphery of the species' normal winter range.

The following list details the twenty-three records of Harris's Sparrow in Mississippi that are recorded in the literature or are in the Bird Record Files of the Mississippi Ornithological Society (MOS) through the winter of 2004/2005. Five specimens, representing four records, have been collected in Mississippi, all of which are still extant in museum collections. Two records are documented with photographs on file with MOS, and five other records are documented with written descriptions that are on file with MOS. The remaining twelve records are sight records without a written description of the bird. Some of the latter records may have had written details at one time, but no documentation is currently on file. This is especially true of birds found on Christmas Bird Counts (CBC), since the former regional CBC compiler, Tom Imhof, apparently discarded documentation

submitted with the counts (Greg Jackson, personal communication).

Twenty of the Harris's Sparrow records are from the northwest quadrant of Mississippi, the area of the state closest to the species' normal winter range. Of these, eleven are from the Delta region of the state, and five others from DeSoto County are within ten miles of the Delta. There are no records from the eastern or southern half of the state except for the three coastal records (Figure 1). The number of records per county is as follows: Attala (2), Bolivar (3), Carroll (1), Coahoma (1), DeSoto (5), Harrison (1), Jackson (2), Lafayette (1), Madison (1), Quitman (1), Tunica (3), and Washington (2).

Harris's Sparrows have been recorded in Mississippi between 3 November and 19 April. They are most frequently seen in January with the number of sightings by month as follows: November (4), December (5), January (10), February (6), March (2), and April (2). Records occurring in multiple months are listed for each month they were recorded. Since first being found in Mississippi in 1942, Harris's Sparrow has been recorded in 20 of the past 64 winters (with winter being the November to April period). The number of records and number of winters recorded in each decade is given as follows (number of records, number of winters): 1940/41-1949/50 (1,1); 1950/51-1959/60 (7, 5); 1960/61-1969/70 (3,3); 1970/71-1979/80 (2,2); 1980/81-1989/90 (3,3); 1990/91-1999/2000 (2,2); 2000/01-2004/05 (5,4). Prior to 1970 there are six records of multiple individuals being seen, with as many as six birds on one occasion and five on two occasions. Since then, all records have been of single birds except for a record of two seen in 1978.

Harris's Sparrows are of casual occurrence in Mississippi and are on the Mississippi Bird Records Committee's review list. All sightings should be carefully documented by photograph and/or by written description. Many of the records below lack substantiating details, and anyone having documentation for these

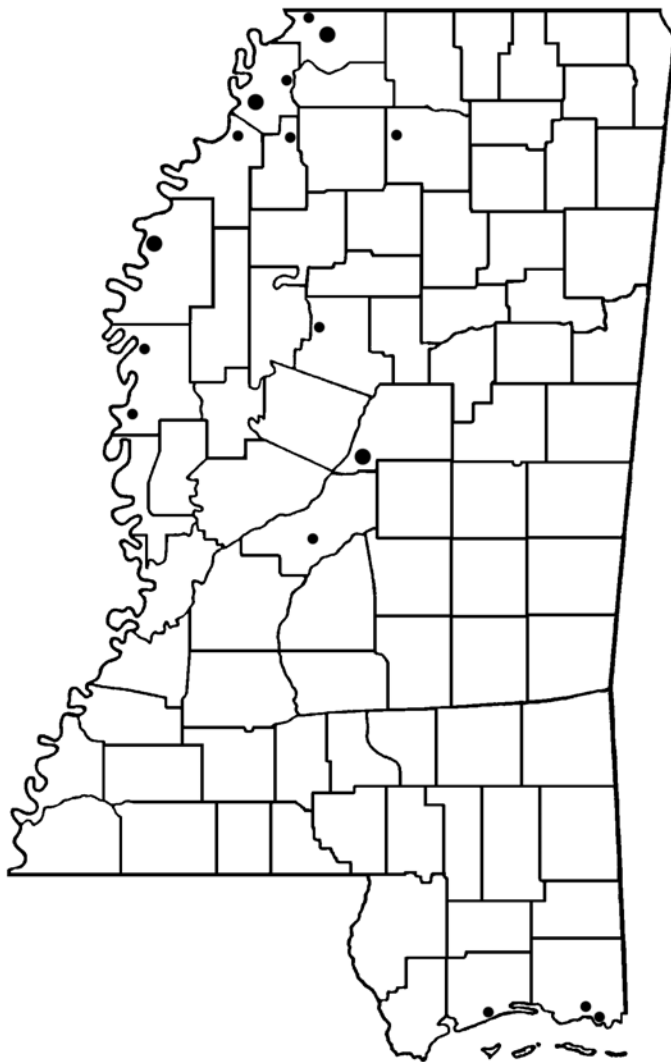
or other records is encouraged to submit them to the Mississippi Bird Records Committee (MBRC). Although most of the records below have not yet been reviewed by the MBRC and many of the records are lacking documentation, I feel that most if not all of the records listed are probably credible, considering the distinctiveness of the species and the experience of the observers. Information on each record is given in the following order: number of individuals, sex and age if given, date, county, specific locality, observers, documentation on file, references in MOS files, references in literature, and notes. After the first mention of an observer's or collector's name in any given record, their initials are subsequently used for reference. Bird Record Cards written by someone who did not observe the bird are listed as "second hand". The age terms immature and juvenile both refer to birds in their first winter plumage, and are listed below as they were used by the observer.

### **Harris's Sparrow Records in Mississippi**

1) 1 female, 17 February 1942, Harrison Co., Gulfport, Thomas D. Burleigh. **Documentation:** bird collected (TB), deposited University of Michigan Museum of Zoology, specimen No.167758; no description on file. **References:** Burleigh 1944, Coffey 1953, 1956, Toups and Jackson 1987, Turcotte and Watts 1999.

2) 2 immatures, 14 February 1953, DeSoto Co., 6 miles north of Hernando, about 0.5 miles west of Hwy. 51, Ben Coffey. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (BC); Coffey 1953, 1956; Lowery and Newman 1953a.





**Figure 1.** Distribution of Harris's Sparrow records in Mississippi. Small dots indicate localities with single records. Large dots indicate localities with multiple records.

3) 5, 18 April, 1, 19 April 1953, Bolivar Co., Rosedale, Bobby Collins, Mr. and Mrs. M.G. Vaiden, m.obs. **Documentation:** two males collected (MV), one each day, deposited University of Mississippi, specimen Nos. 2556 (18 April) and 2558 (19 April); no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (MV); Lowery and Newman 1953b, Vaiden 1953, Coffey 1956, Turcotte and Watts 1999.

4) 6, 29 November 1953, DeSoto Co., 6 miles north of Hernando, Ben Coffey, Harry Landis. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (BC); Coffey 1956.

5) 1 immature, 18 December 1954, DeSoto Co., 6 miles north of Hernando, Ben Coffey. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (BC); Coffey 1956.

6) 1, 4 December 1955 and 28 January 1956, DeSoto Co., 0.5 miles west of Horn Lake, Ben Coffey. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (BC); Coffey 1956.

7) 2 immatures, 15 February 1956 (seen several times prior to this date), Bolivar Co., Rosedale, Mr. and Mrs. M.G. Vaiden. **Documentation:** one bird collected (MV), deposited University of Mississippi, specimen No. 2833; no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (MV). **Note:** Vaiden refers to this record as his third in Bolivar County. His second record is unknown, unless he is counting the two specimens collected in record No. 3 above as two separate records.

8) 3, 3 November 1957, DeSoto Co., Nesbitt, 5.5 miles north of Hernando, Ben Coffey, Lula Coffey, Alice Smith. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (BC).

9) 1, 3 Jan. 1965, Coahoma Co., vicinity of Moon Lake (Moon Lake CBC), Marvin Davis. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** Coffey and Coffey 1965. **Note:** The Moon Lake CBC lies in more than one county, and the county for this record is not specifically recorded. However, in a post to MISSBIRD listserv on 3 January 2005 (MISSBIRD Archive.0501) Davis states that on 3 January 1965 he “passed through the vicinity of Moon Lake” as he traveled from Oklahoma to Oxford, Mississippi. Both Moon Lake and his most likely travel route, Highway 49, are in Coahoma County. In addition, documentation on the Ferruginous Hawk seen by Davis that same day specifically notes Coahoma County as the locality of that sighting.

10) 1, immature, 1 January 1966, Madison Co., 7 miles south of Canton (Jackson CBC), William Turcotte, Ben Coffey, Jr., Lula Coffey. **Documentation:** bird collected (WT), deposited Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, specimen No.4905; no description on file. **References:** Cruickshank 1966, Gandy 1966, Turcotte 1966, Turcotte and Watts 1999.

11) 5, 30 March 1969, Bolivar Co., 2 miles east of Rosedale, Mr. and Mrs. M.G. Vaiden. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (MV); Imhof 1969. **Note:** Vaiden refers to this record as his fifth in Bolivar County. His fourth record is unknown.

12) 1 immature, 15 January 1977, Lafayette Co., Sardis Lake State Waterfowl Refuge, W. Marvin Davis. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record cards (MD; second hand, Wayne Weber); Hamilton 1977, Jackson and Weber 1977.

13) 2 (1 adult, 1 immature), 16 December 1978, Jackson Co., Hickory Hills Golf Course, north of Gautier (Jackson County CBC), Cile Waite, Hylma Gordon, Larry Gates. **Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird

record card (second hand, Wayne Weber); Gates 1979, Imhof 1979, Toups and Jackson 1987, Turcotte and Watts 1999.

**14)** 1 immature, 7 November 1981, Jackson Co., Pascagoula River Marsh, Judith Toups. **Documentation** : no description on file.

**References:** Toups and Jackson 1987, Turcotte and Watts 1999.

**15)** 1, 29 December 1986, Tunica Co., west of Maud (Moon Lake CBC), Carolyn H. Bullock. **Documentation:** no description on file.

**References:** MOS Bird Record Files: bird record card (second hand, Ben Coffey); Coffey and Coffey 1987, Imhof 1987.

**16)** 1 immature, 28 January 1990, Tunica Co., Coldwater River levee near Dooley, Jeff Wilson, Gilbert "Buddy" Beaver.

**Documentation:** no description on file. **References:** Peeples 1998; Gene Knight and W. Robert Peeples (personal communications).

**17)** 1 adult, 25 January 1996, Quitman Co., near Sledge, Fred Broerman, **Documentation:** description on file (FB).

**References:** MOS Bird Record Files: documentation form (FB); Stedman 1996, Schiefer 1998.

**18)** 1 adult, 11-16 January 1997, Carroll Co., Valley Hill, T19N, R2E, SE 1/4 of sec.11 (Barham residence), Ben Barham, Philip Barbour. **Documentation:** description on file (PB).

**References:** MOS Bird Record File: documentation form (PB), bird record card (second hand, Terence Schiefer); Stedman 1997, Schiefer 2004.

**Note:** Bird was reported to be photographed, but photos are not on file.

**19)** 1 immature, 27-29 November 2000, Attala Co., Highway 14 at Roby Creek , 2.5 miles west of Newport (Henne Residence), Frances Henne, James Sanders, Terence Schiefer.

**Documentation:** description on file (FH, TS). **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: documentation forms (FH, TS), bird record cards (FH, TS); Jackson 2001, Knight 2001.

20) 1 immature, January-February 2001 (exact arrival and departure dates unknown), Washington Co., Greenville (Bonnell residence), Kenneth Myron Bonnell. **Documentation:** photographs on file (KB), no description on file. **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: photos (18 slides - KB).

21) 1 immature, 2 January 2002, Tunica Co., 1 mile west of Maude (Moon Lake CBC), W. Robert Peeples. **Documentation:** description on file (RP). **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: documentation form (RP); Cooley 2002, Stedman 2002, Knight 2003.

22) 1 juvenile, 22 February 2004, Washington Co., near Lake Washington, Stephen J. Dinsmore. **Documentation:** description on file (SD). **References:** MOS Bird Record Files: documentation form (SD), seasonal field report (SD); Cooley 2004, Knight 2005.

23) 1 adult, 3 December 2004-18 April 2005, Attala Co., Highway 14 at Roby Creek, 2.5 miles west of Newport (Henne residence), Frances Henne, Gene Knight, Shannon Knight, Terence Schiefer, Marion Schiefer, m.obs. **Documentation:** photograph on file (John Fahnestock), description on file (FH, GK, TS). **References:** MOS Bird Record File: photo (one print - JF), documentation form (GK, TS), bird record card (FH, GK, TS); Cooley 2005, Henne 2005, Knight 2005, Wallace 2005.

**Literature note:** Turcotte and Watts (1999) reference Coffey (1956) stating that “[p]ublished records of eight separate sightings by Coffey Jr. near Hernando and Lake View in DeSoto County extend from November 3 to April 20....” However, in Coffey (1956) there are only six Mississippi records listed (on eight dates), and only four of these records are Coffey’s from DeSoto County; the other two are Burleigh’s coast record and Vaiden’s first Bolivar County record. Coffey lists no records from Lake View but states that he has looked there unsuccessfully for

Harris's Sparrow; he does, however, list a November 3<sup>rd</sup> record, but from Arkansas, and April 20 is not mentioned anywhere in his paper.

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