

Cali, Nov. 15th. 1961

Dr. William B. Robertson, Jr.
Park Biologist
Everglades National Park
P. O. Box 279
Homestead, Florida, U. S. A.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of the 31st. October past has reached me only yesterday.

Our common and good friend Mr. Paulson mentioned to me of your interesting project regarding Elanoides forficatus. I'll be more than happy to give you all possible data relating to this species. First hand I'll give you here some information and later after checking some material at the Museum in Popayán, at Universidad del Cauca of which I am the Director, I will send you more data if there is anything of value to add, specially on dates and ages.

I have studied this species for some time since 1935. In all these years, I have never been able to watch a single case of this bird taking snakes, may be it does, but I have never seen that. My experience here is that they prey mainly on beetles and caterpillars taken by diving to or dodging among tree tops or outer branches, or even at the tree trunks.

They are frequent in areas where there are Oak forests. The Oaks common in Colombia are of the Genus Quercus, and there are at least three different species. On the W. side of the Central Andes, the E. Side of the W. Andes, and the plateau of Popayán the species is Quercus Humboldtii. This tree sheds its leaves twice a year. Once between October and December in Cauca and Valle Departments. In other places other species shed leaves between April and July. When the Oaks have new shoots in December and January appears a species of green beetle (Scarabeidae) in large numbers, that eat these shoots. At this time appears also the Swallow-tailed-Kite to prey on the beetles, that they eat on the wing.

These Kites are found in Colombia from almost sea level to the Páramo Zone, but they are more frequent in the upper Subtropical Zone, or in lower Subtropical or even Tropical if there is good condensation or precipitation in such areas.

I have seen flocks of up to 240 birds migrating south in the Páramo zone. In the Subtropical zone they seem to be quite permanent, and there are places, like the Moscopán area, where one can see them almost every month of the year, being more abundant from December to April.

In 1937 I was able to locate two nests of Elanoides placed on the taller part of Oak trees in the site of Buenavista (2,000 m. o.s.l.) a locality situated about 10 mi. south east of Popayán, where there were then large forests that contained large quantity of Oaks. The nests contained two chicks each, in the month of February, and I collected two chicks just before they were ready to leave the nest, and still having some down attached to the feathers of the head and shoulders, and some dark shafts to the feathers of the crown and nape.

0602

4

I have not been able to watch the behavior at length during the breeding period and only can tell you that copulation takes place with the female seating on the branch of a tree and the male coming to alight on her. They perform some acrobacies in the air too, but I observed this so long time ago, that I don't remember in detail what kind of maneuvering they perform. They are also more noisy during this period and when going with the young. I learned to call them and they came to the call, so it was easy for me either to watch them closer or to shoot them if I wanted specimens.

In different places, and in different years I have collected young kites of this species, and have seen many young ones in flight going with their parents and being fed by them.

The area of Buenavista mentioned above, has been completely deforested, and therefore the "Tijeretas" -local name- are no longer plentiful and only occasionally appear a few or single individuals. In the afore mentioned locality of Moscopán, they are seen in pairs or small groups of 4 to 10 individuals.

In the area near Buenavista, Meta, which is on the E. side of the Eastern Andes -described by Chapman- at about 1,000 m. o.s.l., some years ago, the hills were covered by dense forest, and it was then possible to see these kites there almost any time of the year.

I have seen and collected specimens in the tropical sabanas bordered by forests in the eastern Llanos of Colombia, where they are not abundant, but can be seen in singles or pairs at different times of the year. The elevation of these savannas is between 200 and 500 mts. o.s.l.

I have not seen them yet in the Magdalena Valley in the tropical zone, but are common in some areas of the upper subtropical zone near the headwaters of the Magdalena river. They are more common on all three andean ranges, at the upper subtropical levels. Also I have seen them frequently in the place of Rio Aguaclara, at the base of the W. Andes where the mountain meets the coastal plain of the Pacific drainage, in Valle del Cauca Department 20 mi. W. of Buenaventura. We see them also at several places in the area of our "Parque Nacional de los Parallones de Cali", where there are still some oaks left. This is on the W. Andes in Valle Department. South from here in Cauca Department, in the Munchique area where some oak forests still stand they are frequent in December-February and June-August. A nest was seen here with the birds building it and besides twigs they were carrying some kind of grey moss or lichen, similar to Spanish Moss, to line it with. This took place in the month of December some years ago.

May be we get here at different times of the year both races: E. f. forficatus in Dec.-Febr. and E. f. yetapá in June-August, but is hard to tell, without collecting actual specimens, what race is present during the rest of the year, at places like Moscopán where one sees them all the time.

In general it can be said that Elanoides forficatus is present in Colombia most of the year in several localities. Is more frequent at the subtropical level on the cordilleras, but comes down to the tropical valleys at the Llanos, the Upper Cauca Valley (Palmira), and the Pacific Coast. In the Subtropical Zone are more common where there are Oak forests.

A flock of about 500 were seen by our taxidermist Luis Orozco, at La Candelaria, Huila, headwaters of the Magdalena River, on the E. side of the Central Andes at 2,000 m. elevation. This flock came to roost on two big

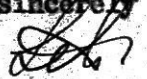
5

dead trees that were literally covered by the birds. These began to arrive at about 4.30 p.m. in groups, and started to perch on one tree first, and when it was full the others went to the second one distant about 70 meters from the first one. They spent there the night and continued their migration ^{next} day at about 8 a.m. This took place at the first part of the month of July 1942.

When I hear again from you, and know what more data you would like to have, I'll write to you after checking the material at the Museo de Historia Natural in Popayán.

Hoping that the above may be of some use for your study, and with best wishes,

Most sincerely yours,



F. C. Lehmann V.
Wild-life Biologist
Secretaría de Agricultura.

P.S. You may address as before to my personal postal address.