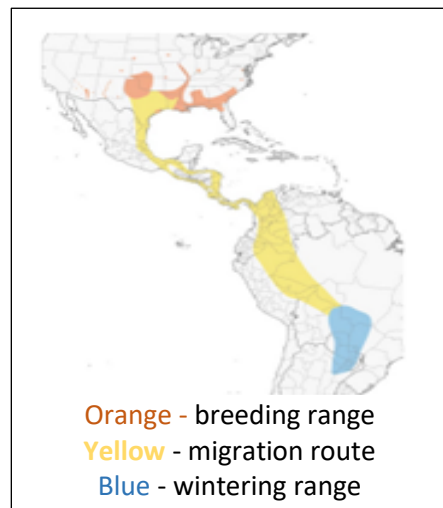


Mississippi Kite



Classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Accipitridae
Genus: *Ictinia*
Species: *mississippiensis*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Highly migratory, from southern United States to Central America and South America. Found in Arizona through the Great Plains, south along the Gulf Coast, except Florida, and east to the Carolinas with the largest populations in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.
- **Habitat:** Prefer riparian zones with tall trees near water and open habitats, such as pastures and agricultural fields, as well as open woodlands, savannahs, and range land for nesting sites. They are also known to build nests in urban parks and golf courses.
- **Conservation:** Least concern, populations are increasing along with their range.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 13.4 to 14.6 inches (34-37 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 29.5 to 32.7 inches (75-83 cm)
- **Weight:** 7.5 to 13.7 ounces (213-388 g)
- **Lifespan:** In the wild, bird banding has shown a longevity of 7 to 11 years.
- **Identifying Traits:** Graceful flier that glides, circles, and swoops in pursuit of prey. They are social birds that may roost and hunt in groups of dozens of individuals as well as nest close to other pairs. Small, slender with long, pointed wings and a long, square tip tail. The black beak has a small, strong hook. The feathers are grey and black with a light grey head and keel, dark grey to black on the wing covert feathers. The face has a supraorbital ridge with black masking around the red eyes. Females are slightly larger than males with no differentiation in

plumage. Immature Mississippi kites have white or buff heads, necks, and undersides heavily streaked with brown and black. The upper body and wings are dull black. The tail has three thin white stripes on the underside. Adult plumage will molt in during their second year.

Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Primarily eat cicadas, grasshoppers, beetles, and dragonflies, supplemented with small snakes, frogs, lizards, small birds, and bats. They usually hunt within ¼ mile of their nest and eat while flying using their feet to pull their food into pieces. Seldom do they perch to eat.
- **Breeding:** Reproductively mature in their second year. Males and females form pairs before arriving at their breeding site around mid-May. They will breed once per year. This species does not exhibit specific observable courtship behaviors.
- **Nesting:** Nesting starts in May and goes through mid-July. Nests are built of twigs and leaves. They may refurbish an old nest. The female lays 1 to 3 eggs. Both parents incubate the eggs for 29 to 32 days. The newly hatched chick(s) is continuously brooded by both parents for the first 4 days and fed with regurgitated food for about 11 days, then dismembered prey for at least 6 more weeks. Chicks will begin to branch from the nest in about 25 days and begin flying at 30 to 35 days.
- **Migration:** Begin their migration in September. Young kites remain with their parents, migrating in groups of 20 to 30 birds. They may also join a mixed flock of up to 10,000 birds that include Broad-winged and Swainson's hawks, and Turkey Vultures.
- **Call:** A piercing "phew, phew" whistle is used to communicate distress or excitement. A more intimate call is made between male and female birds and consists of a soft "phee" followed by 3 or more soft repetitions of the same syllable. This call is used to solicit food in pair bond maintenance, during nest construction, when swapping places during incubation and between adults and nestlings.

Fun Facts!

- When building their nest, kites sometimes choose a location surrounded by wasps and bees, which may help protect the chicks from climbing predators and ward off botflies that attack their young.
- One-year-old kites have been observed hanging around the nest of a breeding pair and helping defend the nest, incubate the eggs, and brood the chicks.



- Mississippi Kites and Peregrine Falcons are similar in wingspan and body length; however, the falcon can weigh up to three times more.
- Kites do not display the circling behavior of other raptors and tend to fly in a straight line.
- Immature kites are often mistaken for young Broad-winged Hawks and Peregrine Falcons.

Importance

- Kites have a diet of grasshoppers, beetles and other crop destroying insects, providing free pest control.

Sources

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