

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Snail Kite *Rostrhamus sociabilis*

The Everglades Snail Kite, *R. s. plumbeus* occurs in the United States only in Florida. It also breeds south to Cuba and Isle of Pines and locally from Mexico south to Brazil (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Florida Snail Kites nest solitarily, or in loose colonies, sometimes in association with other water birds. Nests are found in a variety of vegetation, including trees, shrubs, and even cattails and bulrushes. Nests are bulky structures made of dead twigs and are usually finished with some fresh green vegetation. Clutch size ranges from 1 to 5 eggs, with 3 eggs the most frequent. Eggs are generally white with pale to dark brown blotches, but egg color varies from nearly all-white to nearly all-brown. Incubation takes 27 days, and the young fledge between 24 days of age (Bennetts et al. 1988) and 35 days of age (J. Rodgers, pers.obs).

Snail Kites occasionally take other prey (Sykes and Kale 1974; Beissinger 1988, 1990); however, in Florida, they prey almost exclusively on freshwater apple snails (*Pomacea paludosa*) (Snyder and Snyder 1969). Even though the apple snail occurs throughout north Florida and parts of Georgia and Alabama, the lack of suitable foraging habitat and access to the snail will prevent the kite from further northern colonization. Because birds forage in areas not occupied when breeding, only "confirmed" and "N" codes are shown on the Atlas map.



Illustration © 1995 Diane Pierce, All Rights Reserved.

Seasonal Occurrence. Kite eggs have been found in all months of the year (Sykes 1987b), but most birds generally breed from December to June in south Florida and March to August in central Florida.

Status. The Snail Kite is listed as Endangered by the Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission [editor: now Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission] (Wood 1991). Its range changes greatly with prey availability, which is, in turn, influenced by rainfall. Its historic breeding range included the headwaters of the St. Johns River north to the Oklawaha River drainage, the Kissimmee River basin, Lake Okeechobee, and the Everglades (Sykes 1984). Isolated breeding records exist from central Florida lakes and marshes and a small region in Wakulla and Jefferson counties (Howell 1932; Sykes 1984).

By the late 1970s, the Snail Kite had withdrawn to the marshes on the west side of Lake Okeechobee and the southeast region of Water Conservation Area 3A in Palm Beach County (Sykes 1984). During the late 1980s, Snail Kites expanded their nesting range to include Lake Kissimmee, Lake Tohopekaliga, East Lake Tohopekaliga, the upper St. Johns marshes in Indian River County, and several smaller wetlands in Lee, Hendry, and Okeechobee counties (Takekawa and Beissinger 1989; J. A. Rodgers, unpubl. data). Most of this recolonizing of the kite's former nesting range was associated with drought conditions in the Everglades and at Lake Okeechobee.

Although Snail Kites are often found in remote and inaccessible areas, they were the focus of state surveys

during the Atlas period (Rodgers 1992; Bennetts and Maier 1991), so coverage for this species was fairly complete.

James A. Rodgers, Jr.

Sponsored by John and Mary Rowland

Snail Kite

