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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.

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Mississippi Kite *Ictinia mississippiensis*

The Mississippi Kite, a migratory raptor, is becoming increasingly conspicuous as it reoccupies its former breeding range in Florida and in appropriate habitat in the southwestern and the southeastern states. This lightly built kite finds a wide variety of sites suitable for nesting, including suburban settings.

Habitat. Most southeastern nesting habitat for the Mississippi Kite consists of large expanses of mature lowland and floodplain hardwoods (Kalla 1979; Parker 1988). The kite seems to be more social in Florida than in the Midwest but less likely to colonize urban areas (Parker 1988).

The diet of the kite consists mainly of insects, although small numbers of vertebrates, such as frogs, lizards, and nestling birds are taken (Johnsgard 1990).

The bulky nest of sticks, leaves, and moss is located near the top of a tree. Many nests are reused from year to year; however, renesting following the loss of eggs or young is rare. Most clutches consist of 2 white eggs that are usually unmarked. Incubation lasts 29 to 31 days, and the young fledge at about 50 days of age (Sutton 1939, Parker 1988).

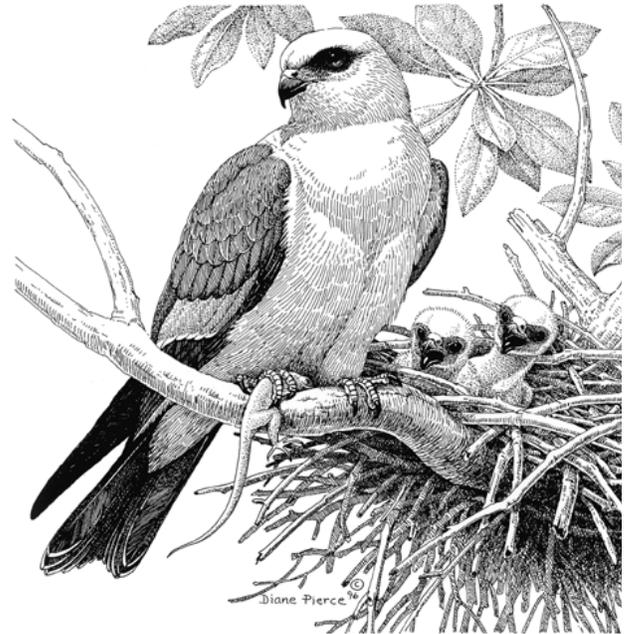


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Seasonal Occurrence. The Mississippi Kite breeds May through July in Florida. According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994), it is a spring and fall migrant chiefly around the western edge of the Gulf of Mexico. It usually arrives in April; most birds leave by mid-September.

Status. The species' historic center of abundance in the United States was in the forested, riparian habitat and adjacent prairies of the southern Great Plains (Parker 1988). Mississippi Kites also were fairly common in parts the southeast, where they nested chiefly along the coastal plain and in inland forests south to northern Florida (Parker and Ogden 1979). The population declined around the turn of the century, reaching a low point by the 1940s, with extirpations most rapid in the small drainages near the edges of its range (Parker and Ogden 1979). Recovery, first apparent in the 1950s, has resulted in ongoing reoccupation of the former range.

Mississippi Kites are probably somewhat more abundant and widespread than is indicated on the Atlas map. Their relatively small numbers and clumped distribution in Florida means they can easily be overlooked, especially in areas not repeatedly surveyed. The location of the small nest within the deciduous canopy and the general character of lowland forests make nests difficult to find.

Kenneth D. Meyer

Sponsored by Russell and Margaret Carleton

Mississippi Kite

