

Rare Animals of Louisiana



American Swallow-tailed Kite

Elanoides forficatus

Rarity Rank: S1S2B/G5

	1	2	3	4	5
State					
Global					
	imperiled		rare	secure	



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Identification:

- A raptor with long, pointed wings and a deeply forked tail
- White head, neck and parts under with black upperparts, wings and tail
- Immatures have white tips on black feathers and fine, dark streaks on the head and breast
- Largest of the North American kites
- Adult length ranges from 51 to 61 cm with a wingspread of 1.3 m

Habitat:

- Prefers lowland areas particularly in the coastal plain along river systems
- Pines adjacent to swampland particularly attractive to nesters
- Areas with tall trees that can be used for nesting and with open areas to catch prey

Food habits:

- Insects, small snakes, lizards, frogs, and nestling birds
- Catches and eats most prey while in flight

Range:

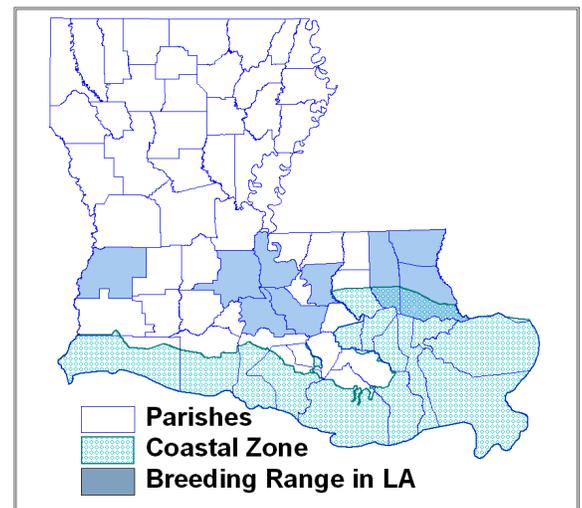
- Breeding Range: northern subspecies from South Carolina to Florida, west to Louisiana; southern subspecies from southeastern Mexico to northern South America
- Winters in South America
- In Louisiana, migrants may be observed statewide

Reproduction:

- Nests are made of twigs and are up to 50 cm across
- Nests are lined with Spanish Moss and are located near the tops of large trees along rivers or forest openings
- Lays two or three eggs which are shades of white with brown and reddish-brown markings
- Incubation, by male and female, lasts about 28 days, young fledge at five to six weeks

Threats:

- Vulnerable to harassment by humans and low-flying aircraft while roosting
- Habitat loss caused by a variety of actions including agricultural, urban development, logging, and flood control



Range based on occurrences in Natural Heritage database

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- Harassment on wintering grounds is a major threat to northern species

Beneficial Management Practices:

- Limit timber harvest near active nest trees to provide buffer for nesting birds
- Restrict airspace over large roosting areas during breeding season and prevent on ground human disturbance
- Thinning of some timber stands may benefit nesters

LA River Basins:

Pearl, Pontchartrain, Terrebonne, Atchafalaya, Vermilion-Teche, Mermentau, Calcasieu, Sabine



Photo by Larry Korhnak

References:

Meyer, K. D. 1995. Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 138 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.