

OUTDOOR CALIFORNIA

THE RESOURCES AGENCY OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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White-Tailed Kite Returns

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The white-tailed kite - one of California's most beautiful birds of prey and once considered on the verge of extinction - is on its way back. Increasing evidence points to a noticeable increase in numbers and extension of range of the white-tailed kite in recent years.

This success is attributed to several factors. Perhaps foremost is less indiscriminate shooting by irresponsible people since California provided protection to all hawks and owls. Hawk killing is not the thing to do. In addition, the kite is a bird adapted to living at the edge of urban communities. Its preferred habitat is the marshes and open waste fields in our Central Valley and coastal plains close to irrigated agriculture.

During winter months large numbers of kites congregate in roosting sites and can often be observed as they move to and from these roosts in the open countryside.

Because of early concern in the 1920s and 1930s over the disappearance of the white-tailed kite, the California Legislature gave the white-tailed kite status of a fully protected bird. This means that the kite, along with the California condor, bald eagle, and trumpeter swan, cannot be legally taken or possessed.

Little is known of the white-tailed kite - its food habits, seasonal movements, habitat requirements, and its

relationship with other forms of wildlife and man in these days of rapidly changing conditions.

To find out answers to the many questions concerning the current status of this fully protected bird, the Department of Fish and Game has entered into an agreement with the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology at the University of California, Berkeley.

This agreement sets up the conduct of a joint ecological study on the white-tailed kite. Studies are currently centered on Bethel, Bradford, Frank's Tract, and Jersey Islands in Contra Costa County and on Grizzly Island in Solano County. Here, at times, kites gather in great numbers.

To learn something of their daily and

seasonal movements and distribution, celluloid bands, approximately 5/8" in height, are being utilized for color marking kites. These bands are placed on the leg together with an aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band that has a number recorded at the Bird Banding Station in Laurel, Maryland. Band colors are black, green, red, blue, white, orange, and violet.

The two color bands placed on the leg give the color combination by which the bird can be identified without recapture. Since these colors can be readily seen by birdwatchers when the kite is observed close by, the Department would like to receive reports of the sightings of these birds.

Anyone observing color banded kites should immediately report this information to the Department of Fish and Game, Special Wildlife Investigations, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento, 95514. Give your name, where and when the kite was seen, and the color combination.

The best way to report the color combination is to list the top color first. For example, a combination of a red band over a black band can be reported as rb together with a notation as to whether the band is on the left or right leg. Shortly after receipt of this information, you will be notified where the bird was banded and when. Your contribution to the knowledge of the white-tailed kite will be greatly appreciated.



White-tailed kite photo by Arvil Parker, Courtland.