

## **Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)**

### **Field Marks:**

- length: 13-15 in; wingspan: 17-19 in
- dark charcoal gray tail
- gray underside with a light-colored head
- pronounced black mask across red eyes
- brownish red patches on adult primary feathers



### **Breeding Range:**

Mississippi Kites are found in southern US from Florida to New Mexico. In Eastern New Mexico, they are common in parks and golf courses. In the Rio Grande Valley they are summer residents.

### **Wintering Range:**

Mississippi Kites migrate to Southern Mexico in September, and return north in mid-March to April.

### **Habitat Preferences:**

They prefer to nest in medium density riparian habitats containing a wide variety of prey species. They use open fields near nesting sites as prime hunting grounds, and may use golf courses in urban areas.

### **Nesting:**

Mississippi Kites are monogamous, and usually lay a clutch of two eggs, 1-2 days apart. Incubation lasts approximately 30 days, with both the male and female incubating the eggs. Nesting kites often congregate in large colonies. The largest recorded colony was over 200 birds in Kansas, although colonies usually contain 10-20 individuals. In years with high prey availability, both young usually survive to fledgling age; however, in times of low abundance of prey the youngest kite may not survive. The young fledge after 25-30 days. Parental feeding continues for an additional 15-20 days.

### **Feeding:**

Although primarily insectivorous, Mississippi Kites are generalists in their feeding behaviors, feeding on a wide range of insects, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish and the occasional small bird. They get their name from the “kiting” hunting behavior, during which they hover in the air with their wings spread. They can remain almost stationary in the air over, and then drop suddenly to catch their prey. This movement is reminiscent of fabric kites flown in parks.

### **Conservation Status:**

Accurate population estimates for Mississippi Kites are difficult to obtain due to their patchy distribution. However, it is estimated that there are about 100 pairs in New Mexico and around 200,000 individuals in North America. Although not listed as threatened or endangered, Mississippi Kites are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Because they are insectivorous, they are susceptible to pesticide contamination and suffered a population decrease in 1969-1972 from DDT contamination.