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White-tailed Kite

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White-tailed Kite Life History

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Habitat

Grasslands

Food

Mammals

Nesting

Tree

Behavior

Hovering

Conservation

Low Concern

Habitat



White-tailed Kites are common in savannas, open woodlands, marshes, desert grasslands, partially cleared lands, and cultivated fields. They tend to avoid heavily grazed areas.

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Food



The White-tailed Kite eats mainly small mammals, but it also eats birds, lizards, and insects on rare occasions. It hunts by facing into the wind and hovering up to 80 feet above the ground while it scans the ground for movement. It dives down to grab prey, feet down and wings held up.

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Nesting

NEST PLACEMENT



White-tailed Kites typically nest in the upper third of trees that may be 10–160 feet tall. These can be open-country trees growing in isolation, or at the edge of or within a forest. Both sexes help choose the nest site; the female may build the nest herself or both sexes may participate.

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NESTING FACTS

<u>Nesting</u>	Clutch Size:	4 eggs
<u>Behavior</u>	Number of Broods:	1 brood
<u>Conservation</u>	Egg Length:	1.5-1.8 in (3.8-4.5 cm)
<u>Credits</u>	Egg Width:	★ Overview (/ guide/White-tailed_Kite/overview)      Life History (/ guide/White-tailed_Kite/lifehistory) Maps (/ guide/White-tailed_Kite/maps-range) Sounds (/ guide/White-tailed_Kite/sounds)
White-tailed Kite	Incubation Period:	30-32 days
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; border-radius: 10px;">Explore Birds of the World to learn more (https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/whtkit/cur/introduction)</div>		Nestling Period:
		35-38 days
	Egg Description:	White overall, spotted with dark brown.
	Condition at Hatching:	Helpless and covered in tan or yellowish down.

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Behavior



While hunting, the White-tailed Kite hovers up to 80 feet off the ground and then drops straight down onto prey items with talons out. They can hold a stationary position in midair by facing into the wind and fluttering their wings, a behavior so characteristic of these birds it's called kiting. White-tailed Kites maintain territories, though they tend to tolerate nearby kites and are not as strongly territorial as other raptors. On rare occasions territory holders or an intruding kite might be met and challenged in flight where the two birds lock talons and tumble towards the ground, pulling apart just before the ground. White-tailed Kites perform ritualized courtship displays in which a male offers prey to a female prior to egg laying. In an often spectacular aerial exchange, the female flies up to meet the male, turns upside-down, and grasps the prey. Pairs stay together during the breeding season, but may or may not pair up in successive seasons.

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White-tailed Kites are relatively common, but their populations declined by

10%

36% between 1970 and 2014, according to [Partners in Flight](#)

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Nesting

Behavior

Conservation

Credits

White-tailed Kite

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more

(<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/whtkit/cur/introduction>)

breeding population is 2 million. The species rates a 10 out of 20 on the [Continental](#)

[Concern Score](#) (<http://www.stateofthebirds.org/2016/overview/methods/>)

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which means it is not on the [Partners in Flight Watch List](#)

(<https://www.partnersinflight.org/watch-list-categories/>) and is a species of low

conservation concern. In the early 1900s White-tailed Kite populations dropped

significantly due to habitat loss, shooting, and nest collection.

Since then, populations have rebounded somewhat.

Today, however, the White-tailed Kite is again in decline.

[Maps](#) (https://guide.White-tailed_Kite/maps-range)

[Sounds](#) (https://guide.White-tailed_Kite/sounds)

Urban and suburban development can reduce the number of nest sites as well as

prey abundance. Modern farming techniques can also reduce vegetation that its prey

use for cover. In a conservation effort in northern California, the California

Department of Fish and Game set aside grazed pastures and allowed them to return

to grassland; they now support about 10 times the number of raptors, including

White-tailed Kites, as before the program began.

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Credits

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Lutmerding, J. A. and A. S. Love (2016). Longevity records of North American birds. Version 2016.1. Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Bird Banding Laboratory, Laurel, MD, USA.

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\(/guide/White-tailed_Kite/species-compare/70708531\)](#)[Swallow-tailed Kite
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(<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/naturalists-notebook-falcon-vs-kite/>)



Living Bird Magazine

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