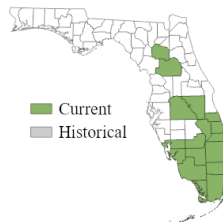


SNAIL KITE

Rostrhamus sociabilis



Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

FNAI Ranks: G4G5/S2

U.S. Status: Endangered

FL Status: Endangered

Description: Medium-sized raptor. Adult male is dark slate gray to black; tail is white with a broad, dark band and pale terminal band; long, hooked bill. Breeding birds have orange-red legs and reddish eyes and facial skin. Adult females are brown with streaking on head, throat, and underparts; soft part colors like males. Juveniles and subadults similar to adult females.

Similar Species: Northern harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) has white on rump and not on tail and has a gliding flight, tilting side to side, unlike the floppy flight of the snail kite.

Habitat: Large open freshwater marshes and lakes with shallow water, < 4 ft. (1.2 m) deep, and a low density of emergent vegetation are preferred foraging habitat. Dependent upon apple snails (*Pomacea paludosa*) caught at water surface. Nests usually over water in a low tree or shrub (commonly willow, wax myrtle, pond apple, or buttonbush, but also in non-woody vegetation like cattail or sawgrass).

Seasonal Occurrence: Nonmigratory. Nomadic dispersal in response to habitat changes (e.g., water level, food availability, hydroperiod).

Florida Distribution: Formerly in freshwater marshes throughout peninsular Florida. Now, depending on water conditions and food availability, restricted to St. Johns River headwaters, Kissimmee Valley, Lake Okeechobee, Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, and Holey Land Wildlife Management Area; Water Conservation Areas 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B in Palm Beach, Broward and Miami-Dade counties; and parts of Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve. Also smaller wetlands in above counties plus St. Lucie, Martin, Hendry, and Lee counties. May disperse widely in drought years.

Range-wide Distribution: Subspecies *plumbeus* is restricted to Florida, Cuba, Isle of Pines, and northwest Honduras. Other subspecies occur in the neotropics.

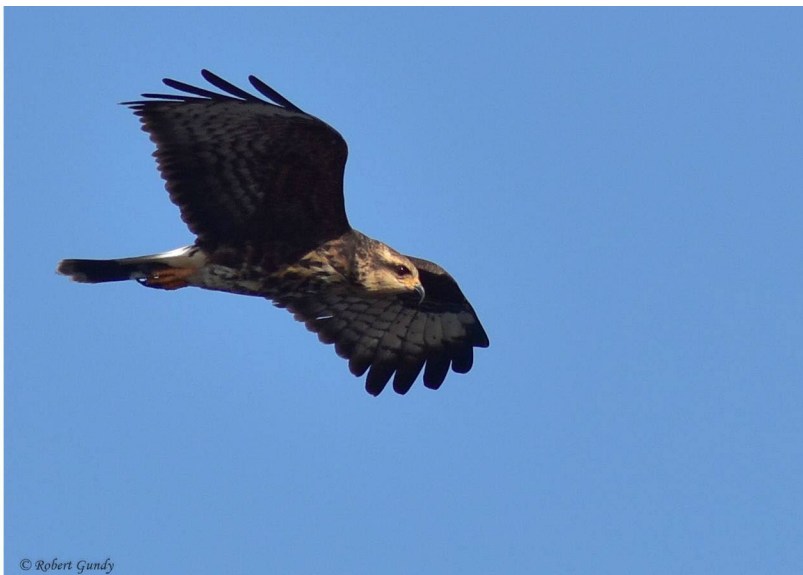
Conservation Status: Much of range lies within conservation areas, although these lands are not necessarily managed for kites. Greatly affected by water management, especially in south Florida. Population fluctuates considerably, declining in drought years. Wetland drainage and conversion and introduction of exotic plants (which prevent foraging success) are major threats. Agricultural runoff has caused pollution, eutrophication, and snail die-offs. Concomitant increase in plant growth has led to continued use of herbicides, which contributes to nest collapse in non-woody nesting substrates.

Protection and Management: Maintain appropriate water levels in the impoundments and levees used by this species.

References: Poole and Gill (eds.) 1995, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



Male in flight. © Robert Gundy



Female in flight. © Robert Gundy