



Mississippi Kite

(*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

DID YOU KNOW:

Mississippi Kites migrate long distances to Central America for the winter months.

Photo from Ohio DNR

EATING HABITS:

Mississippi Kites are definitely raptors (check out the beak) but their preferred prey is large insects, like dragonflies, cicadas and grasshoppers. They catch the insects in the air and eat them while flying. Kites eat snakes, frogs, bats and fish. They sometimes follow large mammals and feed on the insects they flush out.

THE YOUNG:

Mom generally lays 2 eggs and both parents begin incubating as soon as the first egg is laid. The newly hatched chicks are nearly helpless, their eyes are closed and they have little or no down (altricial). Mom and Dad brood the chicks for the first few days of their lives and feed them for at least six weeks. Kites are very good parents; if they think their babies are in danger, they will attack anything that they think is a threat!



From WRE, Houston 1

HABITAT (HOME):



Kites prefer large tracts of forests near open areas such as pastures or fields. These birds are sociable and nest in small colonies of 4-6 breeding pairs. They often reuse or refurbish nests from previous years.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Kites are small raptors, but their sharp talons provide some defense. Additionally, their sociable habits mean that other adults can join in defending nests and babies. Furthermore, these birds often build their nests near wasp nests, which helps to deter predators

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Mississippi Kites help to control populations of insects that are agricultural pests.
- Birds that nest in urban areas live longer than their country relatives, probably because there are fewer predators.
- Immature kites don't look like adults at all. They have white or buff heads and their necks and tummies are heavily streaked with brown and black.
- Their call is a high-pitched squeak, something like a squeaky dog toy
- The body length and wingspan of the kite and the Peregrine Falcon are similar, but the falcon can be 3 times heavier. Lightweight bodies give kites a buoyant flight.
- The overall population of Mississippi kites is stable or increasing. However, they are still threatened in some states by habitat destruction.



Ohio DNR