

NOTES

First evidence of Snail Kites feeding on the introduced snail, *Pomacea bridgesi*, in Florida.—The Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) is a specialized feeder on *Pomacea* spp. snails throughout its range (Howell 1932, Haverschmidt 1962, Snyder and Snyder 1969, Beissinger 1983, Snyder and Kale 1983). In Florida, kites feed almost exclusively on *Pomacea paludosa* and observations of non-snail prey are extremely rare (Sykes and Kale 1974, Woodin and Woodin 1981). Turtles are the most common non-snail food item eaten during droughts (Beissinger in prep.). This note documents the first evidence of kites feeding on a second species of *Pomacea* in Florida, *Pomacea bridgesi* (Reeve), an introduced species commonly known as the mystery snail.

From mid-May through 10 June 1982, John Whitworth (pers. comm.) reported Snail Kites feeding in a flooded agricultural field and surrounding ditches on Whitworth Farms in southeastern Palm Beach County (Beissinger and Takekawa 1983). On 11 June 1982, we observed one kite capture three large *Pomacea* sp. at this site and then perch in a low shrub over an irrigation ditch to extract and consume them. We were unable to recover these snail shells but found an abundance of other shells, live snails and egg clusters that indicated that the only *Pomacea* species present was *P. bridgesi*. We found no evidence of *P. paludosa* in three thorough searches of the field while it was slowly draining.

P. bridgesi was introduced from Brazil for the aquarium trade and has escaped into canals and ponds in Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, and Alachua Counties (F. G. Thompson pers. comm.). It was first reported to us in small canals in Delray Beach (Mark Sanders pers. comm.). We have found it in several disturbed habitats in Palm Beach County.

P. bridgesi is similar in appearance to *P. paludosa* but has a raised, very pointed spire rather than a rounded apex. It has more pronounced stripes on the shell and is more purple than the brown color of *P. paludosa*. Eggs are much smaller (approximately 2 mm vs 4.4 mm) and are laid in a hard, consolidated cluster of several hundred eggs, rather than the average 28 eggs of *P. paludosa* (Hanning 1978). Clusters contain several layers of eggs and do not have a spiraled pattern. As in *P. paludosa*, clusters are laid at night on emergent vegetation above the surface of the water.

Newly hatched *P. bridgesi* are much smaller than young apple snails. Their small size may allow them to disperse more readily into new waterways, as the hatchlings could be more easily carried by water currents. Such an ability to quickly colonize disturbed habitats might explain why *P. bridgesi* is mostly found in habitats in Florida where *P. paludosa* rarely occurs.

Little is known about the life history of *P. bridgesi* in Florida. Nothing is known about the effects of cold winters or water quality on *P. bridgesi* or its competitive interactions with *P. paludosa*. We have found *P. bridgesi* in canals with *P. paludosa* and in agricultural fields with another introduced snail, *Marisa cornuarietis*. Although the latter was recently documented by Snyder and Kale (1983) as a food item of kites in Columbia, we have yet to see kites eat them in Florida. Continued spread by *P. bridgesi* populations in southern Florida could benefit kites by providing many hectares of foraging areas in disturbed habitats as occurs in rice fields in South America (Beissinger 1983).

Because disturbed habitats are constantly being manipulated, they might be stable for a long enough period to offer short-term food supplies for kites, but may be disturbed too often to support kites through a four month breeding season.

We would like to thank John Whitworth who alerted us to the presence of kites on his property and graciously granted us access.

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Florida Field Naturalist 11: 107-108, 1983.

The Snail Kite in the southern Everglades.¹—The Snail Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis*) is considered to be a characteristic species of the Florida Everglades, as emphasized by its former common name, the Everglade Kite. Although the Kite occurs commonly in the northern Everglades, especially in Loxahatchee and Conservation Areas 2 and 3 (Sykes 1984), it seems not to be common in the southern Everglades. In this paper, we review the historic and present status of the Snail Kite at the extreme southern part of its Florida range, the southern Everglades in and near Everglades National Park. We find that it has generally been uncommon there and report its first recent nesting in the park.

¹Editorial processing of this manuscript was handled by Associate Editor William B. Robertson, Jr.