

GENERAL NOTES

Everglade Kites feed on nonsnail prey.—The Everglade Kite (*Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*) of Florida has been called snail hawk or snail kite because it was thought to feed exclusively on the soft parts of the freshwater apple snail (*Pomacea paludosa*) (Nicholson 1926, Howell 1932, Bent 1937, Snyder and Snyder 1969). Furthermore, the other three subspecies of this wide-ranging Neotropical raptor (Friedmann 1950) are known to feed only on species within the genus *Pomacea* (Haverschmidt 1962, 1970; Brown and Amadon 1968). We report here two different instances of kites feeding on nonsnail prey in Florida.

At 14:30 EDT on 19 May 1971 the senior author watched a kite in brown plumage (separating immature males from both immature and adult females usually is impossible in the field) perched on a telephone cable 6.1 m above the water on the Tamiami Trail (U. S. Highway 41) on the northern boundary of the Everglades National Park in Dade County. The bird was studied for about 12 minutes at distances as close as 25 m as it fed upon a turtle of undetermined species with a carapace estimated to be 7 to 8 cm in length. The kite positioned the turtle head down, and held it firmly against the cable with the talons of both feet and proceeded to tear and pull the flesh through the caudal aperture. The bird removed the muscle tissues and viscera in small pieces and swallowed them. Six pieces of turtle were seen eaten. Although actual capture was not witnessed, the turtle appeared fresh, because blood flowed each time a piece of flesh was removed. Compared with the ease of extracting snails from their shells, the removal of pieces of flesh from the turtle was accomplished with difficulty. Several attempts were made to approach more closely, but each time the bird flew a short distance, perched, and resumed feeding (Figure 1). It finally flew off with the turtle held in one foot and was not seen again with its prey.

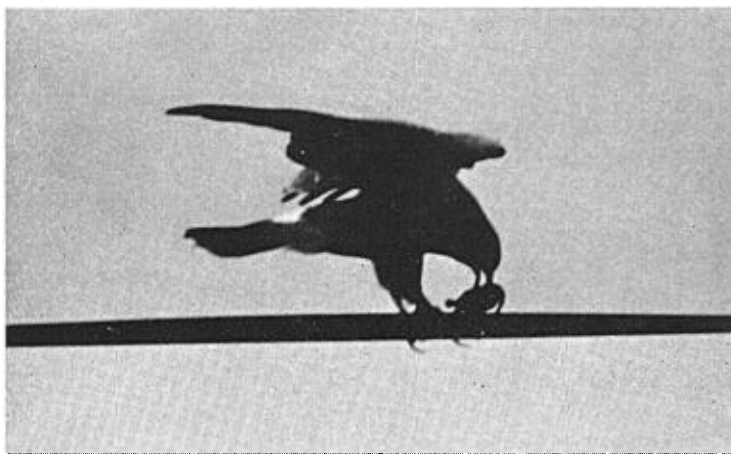


Figure 1. Everglade Kite preparing to feed on turtle, Everglades National Park, Florida, 19 May 1971. Telephone cable runs through the center of picture. Image of the bird has been greatly enlarged from a 35-mm colored slide.

The above incident occurred during the midst of the most severe drought on record in southern Florida. At that time most of the Everglades had no surface waters except in peripheral canals, a few of the deeper sloughs, and a scattering of borrow pits and alligator holes. The snail population was decimated over much of the kite's range in the southern part of the state. Thus the difficulty of finding snails, the usual prey, could account for this incident.

During a field trip in the St. Johns Drainage District reservoir on the headwaters of the St. Johns River, approximately 26 km (16 miles) west of Vero Beach in Indian River County on 18 November 1972, a kite in brown plumage was seen perched on a dead cypress snag feeding on what was assumed to be an apple snail. Present were the junior author and five members of Pelican Island Audubon Society. Apple snails were numerous in the reservoir and we watched two other kites each capture and eat one. While the first-mentioned kite was being studied, a Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) landed on the cypress and forced the kite to fly to another perch less than 100 m away where it continued feeding. As the kite continued to work on the prey item for what seemed to be an unusually long time, we noted with the aid of a 40-power spotting scope, that the bird was tearing strips of red flesh from a carcass. After several minutes of feeding, the item fell from the kite's grasp and was seen to be the skin of a small mammal. It could have been a rice rat (*Oryzomys palustris*), or a cotton rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*), both common species in the area, or the rarer round-tailed muskrat (*Neofiber alleni*). Shortly after the kite dropped the remains, the Turkey Vulture flew in, disappeared from sight for a moment or so, then flew up on the perch and again displaced the kite, which then flew several hundred meters away.

These two observations appear to constitute the only reported instances in which Everglade Kites under natural conditions have eaten prey other than apple snails, though it is not surprising that an individual kite under certain conditions may occasionally take atypical prey.

Over the past 8 years 11 Snail Kites (*R. s. sociabilis*) from South America, taken as nestlings (1965, 1966, and 1967) in Buenos Aires Province, Argentina and raised at the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center have been conditioned to feed on nonsnail food items in captivity. In addition to apple snails, these birds have been fed a number of other foods (Ray C. Erickson and M. Glen Smart, pers. comm.) including ground beef with vitamin supplements, Japanese mystery snails (*Viviparus japonica*), horsemeat in combination with snails, dead fresh day-old Coturnix Quail (*Coturnix coturnix*), Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*), and chicks, and are currently maintained on a commercial diet for birds of prey. The acceptance of these food items by captive birds is not necessarily analogous to the behavior of their wild counterparts but is presented here as a matter of interest.

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Two new southern migrants for Brazil.—The list of birds occurring in Brazil was increased by two species in May 1973 by finding of the Snowy Sheathbill (*Chionis alba*) and the Chocolate-vented Tyrant (*Neoxolmis rufiventris*) in Rio Grande do Sul during the course of an avifaunal survey of the state on which I am engaged under the aegis of the Museu Nacional, Rio de Janeiro and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, with assistance from the Frank M. Chapman Memorial Fund. These species now join the very few that nest in high southern latitudes and are known to reach Brazil during their autumn migration. Neither has previously been recorded beyond Uruguay.

I collected the Snowy Sheathbill, a female, No. 888 in my collection, on the ocean beach 6 km southwest of Cassino at 32° 14' S, 52° 13' W on 10 May 1973. I first saw it in the company of a small flock of Kelp Gulls (*Larus dominicanus*). I found a flock of four Chocolate-vented Tyrants on the ground in pastureland about 50 km southwest of the city of Rio Grande at 32° 14' S, 52° 35' W at an altitude of about 10 m on 12 May 1973. A male was collected and is No. 915 in my collection.—WILLIAM BELTON, *Caixa Postal 119, Gramado, Rio Grande do Sul, 95670, Brazil*. Accepted 31 Jul. 73.

A Pleistocene Gyrfalcon.—A Late Pleistocene to Recent fauna occurs in the Laramie Range of Albany County, Wyoming, in Bell Cave, 18 miles north of Laramie in Wall Rock Canyon at an elevation of 7,800 feet. Preliminary analysis of the fauna shows cold climate similarities with Little Box Elder Cave (Anderson 1968, Univ. Colorado Studies, Ser. in Earth Sci. 6) and Chimney Rock Animal Trap (Hager 1972, Univ. Wyoming Contrib. to Geol., vol. 11, No. 2). So far 47 species of mammals and 10 species of birds have been identified. Seven mammalian species are either extinct or their extant representatives are not in the area today, but are found at higher altitudes or latitudes.

No carbon-14 date has been determined for the deposit but the site is stratified and the bone can be given a relative date. Bone from deeper levels (over 0.5 m) has been mineralogically replaced and is distinct from the more recent appearing nonreplaced bone of the upper level. Some replaced bone also occurs in the upper level, but is apparently present there through rodent activity. Extinct species as well as those forms not found in the area today are represented only by replaced