

WHITE-TAILED KITE
(ELANUS LEUCURUS)

Photo by Paul Conover



Description

The white-tailed kite is a medium-sized hawk with a length of 15 inches (38 cm). Its distinctive plumage consists of a pale gray back, white tail and underparts, black shoulders, and red eyes. Its long, pointed wings have a dark wrist spot and gray tips underneath.

Habitat

This species typically inhabits low elevation grassland, agricultural, wetland, oak-woodland, or savannah habitats. It hunts almost exclusively by hovering, searching the ground below for prey items such as small mammals, birds, lizards, and insects. When attacking prey, wings are put in a nearly vertical position and the bird drops feet first. Nest trees range from 10-160 feet (3-50 m) in height and can be isolated or part of a larger forested area. Nests are composed of small twigs and lined with grass, hay, or leaves.

Range/distribution

The white-tailed kite is a year-round resident of the San Joaquin Valley.

Photo: U.S. Geological Survey/photo by Paul Conover, URL: <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/html/h3280.jpg>, accessed September 11, 2002

References

Dunk, J.R. 1995. White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 178 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C.