

The Swallow-Tailed Kite ©

by Dan Pemble, Kissimmee, Florida

For many of us who reside in the Kissimmee Bay Country Club (KBCC) sub-division, we are afforded an almost-endless array of wildlife viewings on a daily basis! Wood storks, herons, sandhill cranes, roseate spoonbills, ibis, egrets, eagles, cardinals, cormorants, blue jays, mocking birds, doves, turkeys, woodpeckers, hawks, owls, vultures, black birds, rabbits, squirrels, turtles, snakes, geckos, chameleons, frogs, alligators, and fish are the most commonly seen creatures! A bird that is only-sometimes seen in our community is the majestic swallow-tailed kite, the subject of this article.



The swallow-tailed kite, a raptor (bird of prey), can be found in areas of the southeastern United States (particularly Florida) to eastern Peru and northern Argentina. Most birds that live and breed in Florida during the summer months winter in South America, where the species are resident year around.

The kite is a large bird with a wingspan of about 3.7-4.5 feet (1.12-1.36 meters), wing chord (front-to-back wing width) of 15-18 inches (39-45 centimeters), length of 20-27 inches (50-68 centimeters), and weight of about 11-21 ounces (310-600 grams). Additionally, the elongated swallow-tail spread is typically 10.8-14.6 inches-wide (27.5-37 centimeters).

Kites subsist on a variety of prey including: snakes, lizards, frogs, insects, small birds and their eggs, and small mammals – including bats! They have even been seen eating fruits in Central American locations.

Kites are seldom seen in the KBCC area primarily because they prefer to nest in woodlands and forested wetlands that have much taller trees. In fact, they prefer to nest at the top of tall pines & cypress trees that are 60 feet (18.3 meters) high or more. However, occasionally, we can indeed witness their flight – either soaring high overhead above us or while darting across treetops to capture insects and other food.

If you have not yet seen one of these glorious creatures hovering over our community, do stay on the lookout this summer and hopefully some day you will be blessed with the sight!



Fortunately, kites continue to proliferate and are not even close to an endangered species list!