

BAYLANDS

White Tailed Kite

The White-tailed Kite, formerly called the Black-Shouldered Kite, is one of the most outstanding of the more than 150 species of birds that can be enjoyed and studied in the Palo Alto Baylands.

This graceful gray and white bird of prey with black shoulders derives its name from the characteristic "kite-like" hovering method of hunting. It was once common in California west of the Sierras, from coastal Humboldt County and the upper Sacramento Valley down to San Diego County. Their range extends from Washington State to South America. White-tailed Kites are also found along the Gulf Coast of Texas and east to Florida.

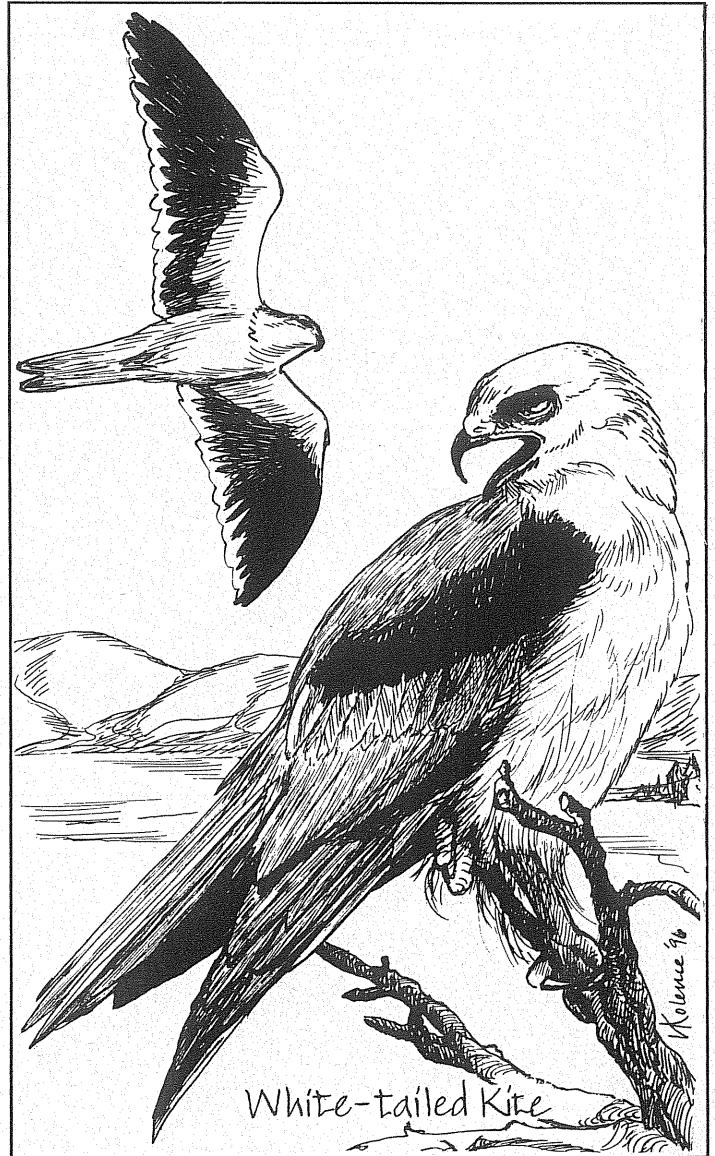
The Kite's characteristic nature of flight makes it an easy target for human hunters. In the early part of the century, large numbers were shot by hunters, under the false but then popular notion that all birds of prey were poultry eaters or otherwise generally "bad". In 1927, Ralph Hoffman wrote in *Birds of the Pacific States* that there "are probably not more than fifty pairs left in California, and in spite of protection by law, the number is slowly decreasing". Fortunately, farmers, ranchers and hunters are better educated now and seldom hunt the Kite. For this and other reasons, the White-tailed Kite is slowly returning in numbers throughout its original range.

Although Kites have been observed year round in the Palo Alto Baylands, they are generally considered to be winter visitors. During the winter Kites feed and roost together in areas where their favorite foods, the California Vole and Meadow-mouse, can be found in large numbers. During their breeding season they prefer to nest in the foothills on both sides of San Francisco Bay and the Santa Clara Valley. Their nest is a bulky mass of sticks and twigs, usually lined with grasses, and is well concealed near the top of a tree, preferably a live oak. Only one brood is raised, usually between

Nature Notes

March 15th and May 30th. The eggs, which number between 3 and 5, are creamy white and heavily blotched with chestnut brown. A young Kite's plumage is tinged with rusty brown on the head, breast, back and the tip of its tail.

Edited and Illustrated by Virginia Kolence



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