



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW (Time 5:01)

NEW ENGLAND COTTONTAIL (HOST SARAH LEON WITH BILL BROOKS)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS. LEON: Hello, there. This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and I'm on the phone today with Fish and Wildlife Biologist Bill Brooks. Hi, Bill, how are you today?

MR. BROOKS: We're doing great.

MS. LEON: Do you have some time to talk to us today about the Swallow-tailed Kite?

MR. BROOKS: I sure do.

MS. LEON: Great. What can you tell us about this rare, beautiful bird?

MR. BROOKS: Well, Swallow-tailed Kites are a very social raptor year round and they tend to nest in somewhat close proximity to each other. Often times, we refer to these areas as neighborhoods. During pre-migration periods, Swallow-tailed Kites will gather in communal roosts, which can number in several thousand birds in just a few number of trees. Swallow-tailed Kite populations that breed here in the Southeast United States make a long distance migration of over 5,000 miles. They cross the Gulf of Mexico, through the Indies, mountain passes of Columbia, to winter in South America in locations including Brazil. Young of the year of the Swallow-tailed Kites make their first migrations at the age of five months and make this migration without assistance from their parents.

Swallow-tailed Kites are interesting that they primarily feed on insects year round, but when they're raising their young they will focus on small vertebrates, such as nestling birds, roosting bat lizards that are sunning up on top of leaves. They'll eat wasp nests that they can find under palm fronds. Swallow-tailed Kites will continue to add nesting materials to their nests throughout the entire breeding cycle by adding new sticks and epiphytes, such as Spanish moss and old man's beard.

MS. LEON: All right. And, Bill, I understand that pesticide and herbicide use in South America may pose a serious threat to these birds. Can you tell our listeners about this?

MR. BROOKS: We've been following many Swallow-tailed Kites through a satellite telemetry program. Actually putting satellite tags and tracking these birds through their migrations from the Southeast United States to South America. We see a higher mortality rates than we would expect on the wintering range. We believe this could be related to pesticide and herbicide use. Many of the compounds used on agricultural lands where Kites winter are banned here in North America and in Europe. Even those compounds that are used here do not have guidelines or rules for the application in South America.

MS. LEON: Can you tell us about some of the other major threats this species is currently facing?

MR. BROOKS: Well, here in the United States we're concerned about loss of breeding habitat to development and to unsustainable forestry practices. Other threats include the loss of migration and wintering habitat in Latin and South America. Especially the ranch lands in Brazil, their winter range, where these ranges are being converted into agricultural fields for growing crops. And many of the timberlands and tree areas that the birds rely upon are being harvested. We're also concerned about bossa or disturbance at the traditional pre-migration roost sites where the number of individual Kites can number in the thousands.

MS. LEON: And can you tell us about some of the ongoing conservation actions that are helping to prevent and improve the Swallow-tailed Kites status in the Southeastern United States?

MR. BROOKS: Well, leading the way is a consortium of partners, which we call the Swallow-tailed Kite Alliance. This is made up of government agencies working on wildlife, non-profits that are working in the conservation field, land managers that manage large tracts of land, and even public citizens are contributing to the conservation of Swallow-tailed Kites. They're doing so by helping us identify critical breeding areas in the Southeast United States. Swallow-tailed Kites have a strong site fidelity to important areas, such as nesting areas and, also, to pre-migration roost sites. So we are working to protect these very important habitats. We need and we are working with our partners to protect these sites, whether they are on public or private land.

It is important to note that a majority of the nesting areas for Swallow-tailed Kites in the Southeast U.S. are on private land. Particularly on family owned and industrial timberlands. So we're working to implement a strong scientific long-term monitoring plan to detect changes in the Swallow-tailed Kite population over time. We are developing a survey methodology with rigorous techniques that we can apply a statistical analysis to determine how this population is doing. We're coaching our land managers, whether they're private or public land managers, about science based forest and land management practices that are both economically and ecologically productive for Swallow-tailed Kites and many other species that depend on those forestlands.

With all of these efforts by our partners and our stakeholders, we believe that the Southeast U.S. breeding population of Swallow-tailed Kites can remain robust and continue to be one of the remarkable raptors that is regularly seen in the Southeastern United States.

MS. LEON: All right. Great. Thank you, Bill. It sounds like there's a lot of great people working on this.

MR. BROOKS: There are.

MS. LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Thanks for listening.