

UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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STEPS TAKEN TO PROTECT RARE EVERGLADE KITE

A portion of the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in southern Florida has been temporarily closed in an attempt to protect the nesting of the rare Everglade kite, the Department of the Interior announced today.

Only an estimated nine to 14 of the hawk-like birds are believed to be left in the United States, and most of the known Everglade kites are at the Loxahatchee Refuge. They are faced with extinction and are even more rare than the whooping crane and the California condor.

Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, which operates the refuge, said at least two more kites have been seen at Lake Okeechobee immediately to the north. Except for these, only five males and four females are definitely known to be alive--all at the Loxahatchee Refuge.

The closure will be in effect at least until July 31 to prevent the kites from being molested or unnecessarily disturbed during the nesting season.

An Interior spokesman said the number of Everglade kites has been reduced because the water habitat for their source of food in southern Florida has been diminished.

The Everglade kite feeds entirely on a single species of large snail which it removes from the shell with its specially shaped beak. The snail is becoming less prevalent because of the loss of its water habitat, and the kite is thus losing its source of food.

The Interior spokesman said the only hope for saving the kites is to restore and maintain adequate water areas in which the snails will flourish and the kite will find ample marsh vegetation for nesting.

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