



## NEWS RELEASE

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## Citizen-Science for Swallow-tailed Kites

*Citizens report a rare raptor and help support conservation, research, and land protection*

**COLUMBIA, S.C.** — Arguably the most striking bird in the southeastern United States, the Swallow-tailed Kite is a species of conservation concern and one of the rarest birds without federal protection. A group of researchers, scientists, land managers, and conservationists, with a unifying passion for the bird have banded together as the South Carolina Working Group for Swallow-tailed Kites.

The Working Group includes a diverse alliance of federal, state, and non-profit partners including U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, The Center for Birds of Prey, The Nature Conservancy, and South Carolina Audubon.

In 2007, the Working Group started an online “citizen science” database and put out a general call to the public to report all their sightings of the bird. As a conspicuous and easily identifiable species, the Swallow-tailed Kite is an excellent candidate for a citizen-science monitoring program. Signs placed at boat landings and gas stations reminded recreational boaters and outdoor enthusiasts to enter sightings in the database.

Citizen-science programs carry the additional bonus of raising awareness about ecological issues, educating citizens about a species of concern and their habitats, and allowing the public to become engaged supporters of conservation. In its first year, while only targeting South Carolina, the database accumulated over 500 sightings from all seven Southeastern states where kites are known to breed in North America.

The database, managed by The Center for Birds of Prey in Charleston, is now regional in scope and sighting reports have grown to over 1500 annually. Members of the South Carolina Working Group and the National Swallow-tailed Kite Conservation Alliance have real-time access to the data as it is entered. Because of the ease of access and accuracy of reports, this information is now being used in numerous state- and national-level conservation and research projects.

The Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge was formed in-part to protect important Swallow-tailed Kite nesting habitat along the Waccamaw and Pee Dee River systems. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have used the Citizen-Science data in their Strategic Habitat Conservation Plan for the Refuge and the larger Winyah Bay Focus Area and plan to incorporate it in climate-change modeling exercises with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Coastal Services Center.

The Nature Conservancy also used the sightings in a proposal to acquire land in a sensitive kite breeding area and was granted a \$1 million North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant in 2009 to add approximately 450 acres to their Black River Swamp Preserve in Georgetown County. The Conservancy submitted another \$1 million NAWCA grant proposal this year. All of the funds will be used for permanent protection of bottomland hardwood forests where kites breed.

The list continues, Audubon South Carolina uses the database as an outlet to compile the results of their annual Swallow-tailed Kite survey along river systems in the coastal plain, while researchers with the Avian Research and Conservation Institute use the real-time reporting information to locate nests and roost sites in research areas across the Southeast.

The state and national conservation partners continue to find innovative ways to use the information generated by citizens to protect and raise-awareness for these striking and awe-inspiring birds. Help the South Carolina Working Group for Swallow-tailed Kites this year by reporting sightings and contributing to the Citizen-Science for Swallow-tailed Kite database. To report Swallow-tailed Kite sightings this spring or summer, call 1-866-971-7474 or link to the STKI Report form at [www.thecenterforbirdsofprey.org](http://www.thecenterforbirdsofprey.org). You can also mail sightings to The Center for Birds of Prey, PO Box 1247, Charleston, SC 29402.

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**The Nature Conservancy** is a leading international, nonprofit organization that preserves plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 14 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 83 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. Visit us on the Web at [nature.org/southcarolina](http://nature.org/southcarolina).