

Spending Time with the Elusive Everglade Snail Kite
By Jane Tutton, USFWS

VERO BEACH, Fla. -- There are days when U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists are reminded why we do what we do. October 11, 2012 was one of those days for me.

I've worked in the South Florida Ecological Services Office for almost 21 years. In that time, I've done some pretty cool stuff such as trapping beach mice and helping capture and band crested caracara. I even got to participate in the release of some Florida panthers.

On October 11, I went to the northern edge of the Everglades and helped band not one, but two, Everglade snail kites.

And just what, you ask, is a snail kite?! [Everglade snail kites](#) are members of the hawk family. They're an avian species that lives off of a highly specialized diet composed mostly of apple snails. They're federally listed as "endangered," so the opportunity to see up-close, touch and assist in the processing of this species was a real treat.

Other folks had gone out earlier in the week, but they were skunked, in other words they didn't see any kites. That day, however, was an incredible day at Stormwater Treatment Area 1-East, located in Palm Beach County, Fla.

Five folks from our office got to help with this effort. Amanda Bloomer, Shawn Christopherson, Tori Foster, Sandra Sneckenberger and I were the lucky ones.

The tagging effort was part of a study taking a detailed look at snail kite movements and how they reproduce, nest and forage in south Florida. One of the kites was outfitted with a Global Positioning System tag that will give us real-time data on her movements. The study is essential in helping us examine the potential effects of construction projects on this species.

Our office is also involved in analyzing the feasibility of two potential wind energy facilities that could have serious effects on snail kites. Having more detailed information on their movements and behavior will provide much-needed data for risk assessments.