



Supporting Good Science

Field research conducted at our Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve expands knowledge about Swallow-tailed Kites.

In these late Summer and early Fall days, many neo-tropical migratory birds are on the move southward. Louisiana-based ornithologist, Jennifer Coulson, is interested in one species in particular: the Swallow-tailed Kite, an elegant, fork-tailed raptor.

Over the summer, a team of Orleans Audubon Society field biologists led by Coulson monitored kites at The Nature Conservancy's [Abita Creek Flatwoods Preserve](#). They discovered two nesting pairs and followed the progress of these nests, which each fledged two young.

Part of her research involved outfitting one of the kites – a female - with a solar powered transmitter that communicates date, time, location coordinates and other data with cell-phone towers. Banded, measured, fitted with the hardware and released back into the wild, the tagged kite has since shared a wealth of information. It includes favorite roosting spots and places for hunting among the preserve's longleaf pine savanna and bayhead swamp habitats, as well as in nearby working forests

and even a spot 36 miles away along the Bogue Chitto River not far from the Louisiana-Mississippi state line.

Then, with nestling successfully fledged by the end of June, she was on the move. The Abita Flatwoods kite left the preserve and headed northeast, visiting several known kite areas before heading an additional 200 miles towards central Alabama, setting up a temporary home base in working forests along the Alabama River for almost a month. After that she moved quickly south to join a large pre-migration roost in peninsular Florida. As September comes to an end, the Abita Flatwoods kite is well on her way to wintering grounds in South America, having crossed the Gulf of Mexico from Cape Sable to Cuba for a brief rest before flying directly to the Yucatán and, most recently, on to the Brazilian State of Rondônia.

This tracking component of Coulson’s research stems from a partnership involving a consortium of large industrial timberland owners, conservation organizations, and researchers to better understand and conserve Swallow-tailed Kite habitat on working forests and on conservation lands. So far, the tracks reveal nesting and roosting areas—a mix of public and private lands—that are important to kites. The partnership uses these location coordinates to identify ownership and reach out to landowners to encourage voluntary conservation of these sites, which will also benefit many other birds. In addition to The Nature Conservancy, other partners include the American Bird Conservancy, Orleans Audubon Society, International Paper, Weyerhaeuser, Avian Research and Conservation Institute and the McDaniel Charitable Foundation.

“This new conservation partnership has the potential to really help kites because much of the land kites depend on is privately owned. TNC’s Abita Flatwoods Preserve protects a large tract of prime nesting habitat, but kites need an even bigger landscape to raise their young. We’re starting conversations with owners of working forests that surround the Preserve to encourage sustainable forestry practices that will maintain enough feeding, roosting and nesting areas for the species to persist in this landscape.” –Jennifer Coulson, PhD

Follow the Abita Creek Kite!

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