



Newsletter

Summer 2023 www.friendsofwhitfield.org

Soaring Like a Kite

The *Ictinia mississippiensis*, or Mississippi Kite, takes a break to breed at the WWCA and feast on an assortment of insects
(story on page 3)

Adult Mississippi Kite in flight. Photo by Don Danko

Letter from the FOW Board

Greetings Friends!

Before getting into it, we'd like to give a shout out to Linda Frazer who recently resigned as President of Friends of Whitfield. We are GRATEFUL not only for the time she put into this organization but for the gifts she shared with us as well.

How about another shout out to our friends at the Central New Mexico Audubon Society. They just gifted the FOW with a \$2700 donation! We are grateful!

As a board, one of our goals is to get the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area on the MAP so that EVERYONE in the great state of New Mexico is aware of the beauty that is right here in the heart of Valencia county. And you can help too. If you have visited the WWCA then tell your friends, your relatives, even the birds in your backyard about this living ecosystem in Belen, NM. And while you're at it consider becoming a member of the Friends of Whitfield. Your financial contribution directly supports the education, restoration and conservation efforts that we perform.

Speaking of money, be sure to bring your pocket book to the VSWCD's Desert Willow and Pollinator Festival, Saturday, September 16, 10 am to 3 pm. There'll be a Pollinator Walk and Monarch tagging, Desert Willow seedlings for sale, a food truck, and things for the kids to do too! See you there.

Friends of Whitfield
Board of Trustees



Friends of Whitfield Board of Directors

Mission Statement:

Friends of the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex (FWWCC) is a non-profit volunteer organization dedicated to supporting the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Complex by promoting habitat restoration, education and conservation.

FOW Board of Directors

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rob-raucci@friendsofwhitfield.org

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Board Member

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Board Member

Frank Mazza
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Environmental Education Manager

Laura McCann
lauramccann@valenciaswcd.org

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area

is located at 2424 Hwy 47, Belen, NM
<https://goo.gl/maps/AKxgnLJGgKD3za7t8>

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Soaring Like a Kite

by Laura McCann, VSWCD Environmental Education Manager

What's in a name? In the Middle Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico, we are honored to have a unique and uncommon raptor choose to nest and rear their young in our midst. They are only here for breeding and on migration; they head all the way to South America for the winter! Although its common name is Mississippi Kite and its Latin name is *Ictinia mississippiensis*, this

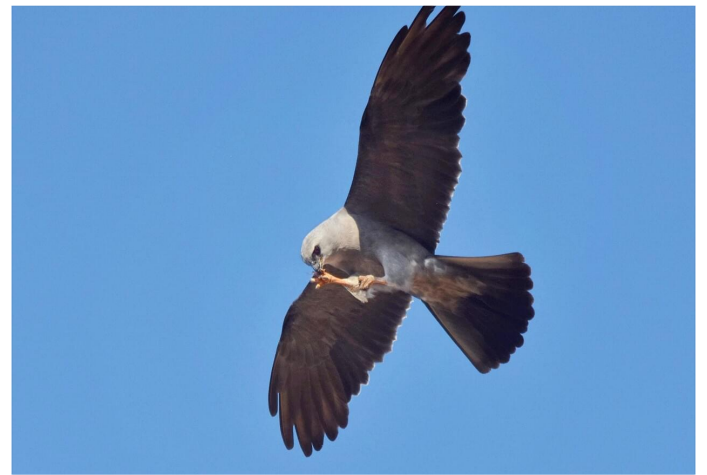


Adult Mississippi Kite perched. Photo: © 2015 Byron Stone.

species is more common in the Great Plains and has spread to new territory in the Southwestern United States over the last hundred years or so. Why then is it named after the Magnolia State (aka Mississippi)? I'm glad you asked! It turns out the bird was first identified in 1811 by Scottish ornithologist, Alexander Wilson, while he was in the Mississippi Territory. He grouped it in the genus with falcons, but it was later reclassified in the genus "*Ictinia*" from the Greek "iktinos" meaning kite. These birds are masters at using the wind to soar and swoop artfully after airborne insects, thus they are named after the human invention of the same name. Interestingly, the spread of this bird to new territory is accidentally due to human help. We often plant "shelterbelts" (aka windbreaks) in grasslands to mitigate the effects of damage to soil and plants by strong winds. This creates perfect habitat for Mississippi Kites who hunt insects over fields and meadows and perch in nearby trees. The fact that our

fields are often near a river or other water source is even more reason for these raptors to set up shop! Planting trees in neighborhoods and cities has also increased this species presence in urban areas.

I have chosen to focus on this raptor species as summer comes to an end for two reasons. One, they are becoming more plentiful in our area and are often misidentified. Two, the youngsters often plop out of their nest trees when first fledging and wind-up needing assistance to either get back into a tree or have hurt themselves on the way down, needing rehabilitation. When identifying a Mississippi Kite in flight, you will notice the overall gray color of adults and their rather pointed wing shape. Although the wingspan is about 3 feet, these birds weigh less than one pound! For this reason, their main prey are insects such as grasshoppers, beetles, cicadas, dragonflies, moths, and bees/wasps. They have been witnessed catching these insects on the wing, then chowing down in flight! They may sometimes also hunt small rodents,



Adult Mississippi Kite eating on the wing.
Photo by Marky Mutchler. Photo: ©2017

frogs, or bats. When other prey is scarce, they may even eat roadkill. If you have the good fortune to view a Mississippi Kite perched at close range, you will notice the head and belly is lighter gray, while the upper side of the wings and the back are a darker shade of gray. The eyes of adults are red, which I find fascinating. Another aerial predator, Cooper's Hawks, have the same reddish eye color as adults.

(continued on page 4)

Volunteer News - Summer 2023

by Frank Mazza, Volunteer Coordinator

“Summertime and the livin is easy.”

When I read the above Gershwin lyrics from Porgy and Bess, I nostalgically think back to my youth in the 50s and 60s. I perhaps naively think of that time growing up in Vermont as a less complicated, happier, easier time. I don’t think I’m alone in this. I suspect the young people of today will also follow the same pattern and look at the days we’re currently living as the “good old days.” And yet as I write this, Phoenix is in the 26th day of above 110 daytime temperatures. Vermont has just experienced its second 100-year flood in 13 years. Nine inches of rain in 24 hours swelled mountain streams that led to home and business devastation in several towns and cities. Climate change is slowing down the jet stream and causing weather patterns to hover over countries in an unprecedented way. Europe is also sweltering. Canadian wildfires impacted the air quality not only in the Eastern United States but also in Europe. What we’re seeing and experiencing is not even the new normal because the changes are continuing to happen. We don’t appear to have arrived at a new normal yet.

At times like these, we’re blessed to have the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area that we can look to as a place to embrace, protect, and preserve. It’s a place where we can envision what we want for the future of our natural world. And our actions can bear witness to that vision. Volunteering is one of those actions. Many of you are already volunteering. Thank you. The Friends of Whitfield can always use more volunteers to get the word out about the conservation area, to assist at events, to work on maintenance projects, to help with youth and adult education, to research and write articles, and to serve on the board of directors. We have a match for your talents and interests. 🐦

Frank Mazza, Volunteer Coordinator,
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(“Kite,” continued from page 3)



Juvenile Mississippi Kite perched. Photo by Andrew Spencer 2020

This brings me to the juveniles of this species. As a reminder, birds are full grown and the same size as their parents when they leave the nest; they do not get



Mississippi Kite pellet. All raptors cough up pellets of what they cannot digest, including insect exoskeletons! Notice the green beetle shells. Photo by Laura McCann 2023

(“Kite,” continued from page 4)

bigger each year like human youngsters. However, juvenile birds are sexually immature and often have different feather markings from their parents. In the case of Mississippi Kites, the juveniles have vertical streaks of brown and white on their bellies and underside of their wings, but the head and back of the bird are grayish. Juveniles’ eyes are dark instead of red. Since this species typically has only 1-2 eggs per clutch (very rarely 3), it is important to be respectful of their nests and careful not to disturb them! They tend to nest in colonies, so where there is one nest, there may be others nearby. This is atypical of raptors, since most species are more solitary and territorial about their nest sites! Be aware, though, that while they don’t mind nesting close to others of their own species, they are not fond of humans or pets getting close to their nest sites! They will swoop on you or your dog if you venture too close. However, rest assured they do not usually make contact. Wearing a hat or waving your arms if one comes close should keep you safe. Remember they are very lightweight and do not hunt humans or dogs and cats. I would say even your chickens are safe from this bird, unless they are tiny chicks. As always, happy birding and I hope you get the chance to spot one of these beautiful raptors this season!

If you do find a youngster on the ground that cannot fly, please give me a call: 505-866-9999. I am always happy to give guidance or come over to your location to help a bird that needs rescue! *Please see the flyer in this newsletter for more information on what to do if you find an injured bird. 🐦

2023 SOLAR ECLIPSE

Saturday October 14

Whitfield WCA will be a public viewing site for the Annular Solar Eclipse! We will have viewing glasses and information on hand for the public FREE of charge!

Belen, New Mexico, USA
 Annular solar eclipse visible (89.75% coverage of Sun)
 Magnitude: 0.9591
 Duration: 2 hours, 56 minutes, 29 seconds
 Duration of annularity: 4 minutes, 3 seconds
 Partial begins: Oct 14 at 9:13:20 am
 Full begins: Oct 14 at 10:35:07 am
 Maximum: Oct 14 at 10:37:59 am
 Full ends: Oct 14 at 10:39:10 am
 Partial ends: Oct 14 at 12:09:49 pm
 Times shown in local time (MDT)
 This day was cloudy 23% of the time (since 2000)
 Pin See animation of how it will look >

Did You RENEW?

As a member your support directly impacts the work we do for the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

It’s easy to renew or become a new member by registering on our secure website at:

<https://friendsofwhitfield.org/become-a-member/>

And thank you!



HOW TO HELP AN INJURED BIRD

If you find an injured bird, carefully put it in an appropriate size cardboard box with a lid. (Don't give a small bird too much room, or a big bird not enough room). Next, place the box in a warm, dry, and quiet place inside. Do not poke holes in the box! The bird can see through these and become stressed. Don't worry; they can breathe through the cracks. Do NOT give the bird food or water. Birds often go into shock when injured, and their bodies are not ready to eat or drink.



Within 24 hours, get the bird to a licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator. If you do not know who is legally permitted to rehabilitate birds in your area, contact your state's wildlife authority. They should have a list of individuals or organizations with proper permits. In New Mexico, you can contact the New Mexico Department of Game & Fish:



www.wildlife.state.nm.us
(505) 476-8000

If a bird has hit a window and is still alive, it may just need a little time to regain its senses, then may be able to fly away. Just keep cats, dogs, or humans away from the bird until it is safely on its way. Remember, it is **ILLEGAL** to rehabilitate wildlife without a permit. THANK YOU for doing your part to help rescue an injured bird and transport it to a Wildlife Rehabilitator!





2023

Desert Willow & Pollinator Festival



Saturday September 16
10:00am-3:00pm

10am-11am:
Pollinator Walk & Monarch Tagging!

TALKS in the VISITOR CENTER

11am-Noon:
Birds & Bats!

12:30-1:30:
Bringing Bees to Your Backyard!

2:00-3:00:
Monarchs & Moths!

Scan with
your phone!



- * Desert Willow seedlings for sale!
- * Local Vendors!
- * Food Truck!
- * Family Fun!



2424 Highway 47
Belen, NM, 87002
(505) 864-8914





Your grocery purchases can help keep a local Valencia County treasure alive and thriving!



The Friends of Whitfield have teamed up with Smith's to provide an easy way for YOU to support the Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area.

Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area is the only conservation area in Valencia County. Nestled along the Rio Grande in Belen, this 97-acre tract of enhanced wetlands not only serves as a resting place and home to over 200 species of birds but also to hundreds of native plants, shrubs and trees

One of the ways you can help is through Smith's Inspiring Donations program. It makes donating to Friends of Whitfield easy based on the shopping you do every day. Once you link your Smith's Reward Card to Friends of Whitfield, all you have to do is shop at Smith's and swipe your Shopper's Card. Here's how it works:

1. Create a digital account.

A digital account is needed to participate in Smith's Inspiring Donations. If you already have a digital account, simply link your Shopper's Card to your account so that all transactions apply toward the organization you choose. If you don't have a digital account, click [HERE](#).

2. Link your Card to our organization.

Selecting the organization that you wish to support is as simple as updating the Smith's Inspiring Donations selection on your digital account.

1. Sign in to your digital account.
2. Search for your organization [here](#). The name to search for is: **Friends of Whitfield Wildlife Conservation Area**
3. Enter the name or NPO number of the organization you wish to support. **Our NPO number is: US071**
4. Select the appropriate organization from the list and click "Save".

Friends of Whitfield will also display in the Smith's Inspiring Donations section of your account. If you need to review or revisit your organization, you can always do so under your Account details.

3. The Friends of Whitfield earns.

Any transactions moving forward using the Shopper's Card number associated with your digital account will be applied to the program, at no added cost to you. Smith's Inspiring Donations will donate 0.5% of all eligible spending to organizations that customers have linked to their Rewards Card.

If you have any questions, please contact Smith's [Customer Service Center](#).

