

This is raptor number 5 in our series of pamphlets featuring the raptors seen on the CCJ estate. To date we have covered the three Sparrowhawks, the European Honey Buzzard and now the Black-winged Kite. Still to come is the Gabar Goshawk, Long-crested Eagle, Common Buzzard, African Harrier Hawk and Spotted Eagle Owl.



Want to learn more about the exciting environment of the Greater Woodmead Estate?

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THE COUNTRY CLUB
JOHANNESBURG



Black-winged Kite

**No.5 in our series:
Raptors of the Woodmead Estate**



Description:

This kite is distinctive with its long falcon-like wings; white, grey and black plumage; and forward-facing red eyes. The wings extend beyond the tail when the bird is perched. Adults measure around 35cm in length, with a wingspan of 78-99cm. When in flight, the tail is completely visible and square in shape – not forked like other kites.

This small raptor is able to hunt by hovering on upturned wings about 50 meters above the ground. When prey is sighted, the kite glides gracefully straight down into the grass. Black-shouldered Kites are highly nomadic - moving in search of prey.

Distribution and Habitat:

The Black-winged Kite is resident throughout South Africa. Their habitat is mainly grasslands, savannahs and open cultivated areas and is largely absent from closed woodland and forest areas. They also inhabit urban areas where they will favour grassy roadside verges, golf courses and similar.



Diet:

Mainly small rodents found in grasslands. However it also eats crickets, grasshoppers, small reptiles and smaller birds.

Lifespan:

On average, Black-winged Kites will live up to around 6 years.



Breeding and Reproduction:

During the breeding season, Black-winged Kites engage in a ritual of aerial courtship, involving single and mutual high flight, in circular patterns. Usually, the male will fly around with the wings held up high, rapidly fluttering. Females initially feed the young, sometimes hunting close to the nest but will also receive food from the male. After fledging the young birds continue to be dependent for food on the male parent for about 80 days, initially transferring food at perch and later in the air.

They form monogamous pairs, and some will breed up to twice during the breeding season. The female is in charge of building the nest, although the male can help collect materials. Usually, the nest will be built in the canopy of a tree, slightly elevated above the ground. Three or four eggs are usually laid, then incubated by the female for 30 days. Throughout this time the male is in charge of bringing food and protecting the territory.

Once the chicks have hatched, the nestling period lasts around 36 days, and both parents take turns feeding them. After around 5 weeks, the chicks are ready to leave the nest, and they will disperse widely, sometimes going as far as 1000km away from the nest.

Predators:

Black-winged Kites don't really have any major predators although they may fall prey to the Tawny eagles, Bateleur or Spotted Eagle Owl, on occasion. Instead, their major threat is loss of habitat. For example, areas with high numbers of sheep and rabbits cause the Black-winged Kite population to decline as these animals can cause the soil to become more compact, reducing the number of rodents, which is the main source of food for the Black-winged Kite.



Interesting Facts:

- The black-winged kite is most often referred to as the black-shouldered kite. This is due to the black plumage around the "shoulder" area.
- They spiral into the wind in the same way a kestrel does. They soar upwards with v-shaped up-curved wings, and their tail fanned. Their flight is also described as winnowing, and they are incredibly graceful in their movements.
- They only ever make a noise during the breeding season. The rest of the time they are mostly silent, so they're really hard to hear.