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Received 15 March 1987; Accepted 20 August 1987

J. Raptor Res. 21(3):124

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AMERICAN SWALLOW-TAILED KITE USES MISSISSIPPI KITE NEST

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On 28 May 1985 I found an American Swallow-tailed Kite (*Elanoides forficatus*) nest at the Webb Wildlife Center, Hampton County, South Carolina. The nest was in a 36 m high, 52 cm dbh loblolly pine tree (*Pinus taeda*) located within a five ha thinned (basal area = 11.5 m²/ha) pine stand surrounded by a laurel oak (*Quercus laurifolia*)-switch cane (*Arundinaria gigantea*) forest interspersed with overcup oak (*Q. lyrata*)-swamp tupelo (*Nyssa sylvatica* var. *biflora*) sloughs. The nest was 390 m north of the Savannah River floodplain and 1.3 km north of the river itself. An active Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*) nest was found within the same stand and near the top of a similar-size loblolly pine 72 m northeast of the Swallow-tailed Kite nest. The Swallow-tail pair fledged one young about 15 July while the Mississippi Kite pair fledged one young during the last week of July.

On 26 May 1986 I returned to the area and found a pair of Swallow-tailed Kites (presumably the same as last year) nesting on top of the previous year's Mississippi Kite nest. New nest material, primarily Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) and some twigs, had been added to the top of the old nest.

I have found or observed 28 Swallow-tailed Kite nests in South Carolina between 1980-1986 of which six cases represent probably the same bird(s) reusing the same area in two consecutive years. Average distance between consecutive-year nests is 175 m (range 72-275 m). In no case has a Swallow-tailed Kite been found reusing the same nest. New Swallow-tail nests do not appear very substantial although some nests appear bulkier than others (pers.

obs.). Nest deterioration is obvious during winter months, but the basic foundation is usually intact the following spring when kites arrive from their wintering grounds. Although Bent (Life Histories of North American Birds of Prey, Part I. Dover Reprint, New York. 1961) reported that Swallow-tailed Kites do build on an old nest, I have found nothing in the literature to support this claim. Snyder (Breeding biology of Swallow-tailed Kites in Florida, *Living Bird* 13:73-97, 1974) found no evidence of nest reuse by Swallow-tailed Kites in southern Florida, but one nest was built in the same tree fork as a previous year's nest.

In coastal South Carolina Swallow-tailed Kites and Mississippi Kites usually occupy similar habitat (riparian woodland and mixed pine-swamp forests) and often co-occur in mixed feeding flocks (pers. obs.). However, Swallow-tails arrive on South Carolina breeding grounds in late March, about three to four wks earlier than Mississippi Kites. Both species place their nests near the top of tall trees (usually loblolly pine); Swallow-tailed Kites observed to date (N = 28) liberally use Spanish moss in nest construction while Mississippi Kites use only twigs (N = 8).

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Received 15 November 1986; Accepted 31 August 1987