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FEDERAL REFUGE IN FLORIDA PRODUCES TWO RARE EVERGLADE KITES

Two young of the extremely rare everglade kites were successfully reared on the Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in southern Florida this summer due to special protective measures, the Department of the Interior announced today.

Fewer than 20 of the kites were left in the United States at the beginning of the nesting season last spring. Approximately 15 of them spent the summer at the Loxahatchee Refuge, and a pair was seen at Lake Okeechobee, immediately to the north.

The two young birds came from the only nest known to have been completed by the kites this year. An order temporarily closing that part of the refuge frequented by the kites was lifted July 31 after the two young birds were able to fly. Refuge personnel said fishermen who normally use the area cooperated fully in respecting the closure.

The Everglade kite, a member of the hawk family, is dark gray or brown, depending on the sex. It has a white tail patch and red feet. The predominant color of males is gray. The kite feeds entirely on a species of large snail found only in a marsh habitat.

Once fairly common over much of Florida, the kite has been greatly reduced in numbers because of drainage, droughts, and fluctuating water levels which have adversely affected the snail.

Interior's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, which administers Loxahatchee Refuge, said this is the second successive year in which the kites have nested on the area. One new bird was reared last year.

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