



Fourth Crossing Wildlife factsheet



Black-shouldered Kite

scientific name
"*Elanus axillaris*"

other names
Australian Kite



<https://mol.org/species/>

Description

Adult : Pale grey plumage on wings with black markings on shoulders, pure white head and body. Tail and wings are black. Red eyes. Black markings at front of eyes which extends over and to rear of eye. Cere and legs are a bright yellow.

Juvenile : Deep buff head and upper breast, back and wings mottled buff or brown with prominent white tips. Brown eyes. Becomes progressively whiter.

Call : The primary call is a clear whistle, uttered in flight and while hovering.

The Black-shouldered Kite is found throughout Australia and is common in coastal areas but scarce in semi-arid and arid regions. The Black-shouldered Kite is one of two Australian birds-of-prey that hovers in mid-air when hunting for food (the other is the Nankeen Kestrel). Diet consists of mice, lizards, insects, etc. The kite is commonly seen alone or in pairs, which are monogamous. It sometimes congregates in family groups. It breeds mainly in spring, but any time when food is abundant, such as during mouse plagues. Birds engage in aerial courtship displays which involve high circling flight and ritualised feeding mid-air. The kite's nest is small and compact, often made of eucalypt or pine leaves and it lays 3 to 4 eggs, but can have between 2 and 4 successive broods. Incubation is about 30 days, by the female. The young fledge in 5 weeks. Juveniles disperse widely from the home territory. The Black-shouldered Kite has a striking resemblance to the Letter-winged Kite, with the latter being a night hunter which is not often seen in the daytime.