



Brazil

Protection of swallow-tailed kite wintering destinations

It was terrifically exciting when we began using Microwave Telemetry's smallest PTT in 1996 to discover the migration route and destination of the small population of swallow-tailed kites that nests in the United States. In a matter of weeks, we went from knowing almost nothing about this behavior to describing a well defined, 8,000 km journey certain to present many challenges and risks for this lightly built, social raptor.

Since then, Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) has used battery- and solar-powered PTTs to identify stopover areas and other critical passage points, rates and patterns of movement, the influences of weather, and the locations and timing of mortality. It is the winter range, however, that demands the most attention from those who wish to shape a conservation strategy for this species. By combining the satellite data with the locations of our study birds carrying VHF transmitters, ARCI has uncovered the details of how wintering swallow-tailed kites consistently gather in large communal roosts (sometimes containing 2,000 to 3,000 birds) on fewer than 20 privately owned ranches in southwestern Brazil.



Ken Meyer

One goal is to work with the Brazilian government to protect these sites under binding cooperative agreements with the land-owners (who would retain ownership). We also are interested in learning whether we can influence survival in other ways, and we hope to collaborate with Brazilian colleagues in a satellite-tracking study of swallow-tailed kites from the Brazilian breeding population—which nests sympatrically with the wintering population from North and Central America—to determine their migration corridor and wintering destination.

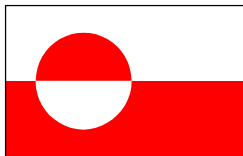
Ken Meyer, director of the Avian Research and Conservation Institute, Gainesville, Florida, USA.



Swallow-tailed kite

Photos courtesy of Gina Zimmerman and Ken Meyer, respectively

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Greenland

Satellite tracking gyrfalcons in Greenland

Gyrfalcons are the largest of the falcons and breed circumpolar to the arctic. Beginning in the summer of 2000, The Peregrine Fund began a long term project using PTTs to track the seasonal movements of gyrfalcons in Greenland. Due to the dark and long-lasting subzero winters in Greenland there is little to no information known on the gyrfalcons' seasonal movements, for example, whether or not they migrate at all or stay on their breeding territories year round.



Kurt Burnham holding two gyrfalcons

Using two study areas on the west coast, Kangerlussuaq at 67°N and Thule at almost 77°N, we placed PTTs on both male and female adult and juvenile gyrfalcons. The information we have gained has provided us with the first ever detailed look at the seasonal movements of gyrfalcons in Greenland and will aid us in better focusing our conservation and research efforts in the future. Already we have identified what is most likely the main wintering area for gyrfalcons on the West Coast of Greenland and learned a tremendous amount about the migration routes that are used.

Beginning in the late summer of 2004 we will expand our research to the East Coast of Greenland and begin working in the Scoresbysund area.

Kurt Burnham, The Peregrine Fund



Gyrfalcon

Photos courtesy of Jack Stephens and Jack Cafferty, respectively

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