

THIS WEEK ON THE LLANO ESTACADO

4-19-23-2010



Mississippi Kites moved to Midland in the late 1950's. The species specializes in eating cicadas (locusts) and grasshoppers. Their original home was along the rivers of the Great Plains and in the eastern United States.

When they arrived, the large dog-day cicada was extremely common. The birds spread across town, much to the dismay of homeowners, for the birds aggressively protect their nest, swooping down and hitting people with their talons. They love to nest on golf courses, because the lines of trees are similar to the lines of trees along rivers.

In 1980 the cicada wasp arrived in Midland, and the numbers of cicadas

fell by 90 percent. The numbers of Mississippi Kites have also fallen.

This bird was preening, using his talon to straighten the barbels (individual hairs) of his feathers. Kites are small hawks with pointed wings, and the adults appear silver white and gray, while the immature are streaked. The Kites should be returning to Midland by the first of May, and will stay until September. They winter in South America.

TEACHER AND STUDENT CHALLENGE; Please report any sightings of the species to us (bwilliams@sibleynaturecenter.org). We would like to know what neighborhoods where the species can still be found.