

# Hovering Skills of Black-winged Kites

Ritesh Joshi and Kanchan Puri



*World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) 2026 to be celebrated on 9 May 2026  
with this year theme:  
“Every Bird Counts – Your Observation Matter”*

**B**LACK-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) are diurnal raptor bird species and classified under the “Least concern” category by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2019. As per India’s Wild Life (Protection) Amendment Act, 2022, this spp. is listed under Schedule II degree of protection. Also, they are listed in “Appendix II” with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but for which trade must be controlled to avoid utilisation incompatible with their survival. They are widely distributed across open habitats (plains/grasslands/shrublands/agricultural land) in sub-Saharan Africa, southern Asia, and southwestern Europe (<https://datazone.birdlife.org>). They have white, grey, and black plumage with red irises. Species prey on small insects, birds, lizards, and rats with a remarkable success rate. A study also revealed a correlation between rainfall, wheat cultivation, and rodent abundance that leads to a large aggregation of the Black-winged Kite.

Raptors play an important role in the conservation and preservation of species at the ecosystem level, and their presence indicates a healthy ecosystem that is rich in biodiversity. It provides ecosystem services (pest control), particularly in the agriculture sector. The State of India’s

Birds 2023 report, a periodic assessment of the distribution ranges, trends in abundance, and conservation status of most bird species in India, noted a decline in open-habitat raptor populations over the past few years. Around the world, raptors are thought to be declining due to habitat loss, pesticide accumulation, and targeted killing in some countries (<https://stateofindiabirds.in>).

## Hovering Feature

The Black-winged Kite has characteristic hover-hunting behaviour. They can hover for much longer periods, even in very light winds, by using rapid, shallow wing beats and adjusting the angles of their wings and tails in real time to adapt to wind speed changes, enabling silent, prolonged hovering. This allows it to hunt over open grasslands by plunging downwards at extremely high speed and precision to strike the prey directly. Their excellent aerial hovering ability allows them to monitor the ground for hours.

Researchers reveal that the black-winged Kite has physical adaptations that make it a better hoverer than almost any other kite. The avian brain has numerous specialisations for navigation and processing visual information. Its feathers make its hovering almost completely silent, preventing the high-frequency “whirring” sound of flapping wings from