

We value your privacy

We and our [partners](#) store and/or access information on a device, such as cookies and process personal data, such as unique identifiers and standard information sent by a device for personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development. With your permission we and our partners may use precise geolocation data and identification through device scanning. You may click to consent to our and our 1505 partners' processing as described above. Alternatively you may click to refuse to consent or access more detailed information and change your preferences before consenting. Please note that some processing of your personal data may not require your consent, but you have a right to object to such processing. Your preferences will apply to this website only and will be stored in IABGPP_HDR_GppString cookie for 13 months. You can change your preferences or withdraw your consent at any time by returning to this site and clicking the "Privacy" button at the bottom of the webpage.

Please note that this website/app uses one or more Google services and may gather and store information including but not limited to your visit or usage behaviour. You may click to grant or deny consent to Google and its third-party tags to use your data for below specified purposes in below Google consent section.

MORE OPTIONS

DISAGREE

AGREE

Lu spotted the kite and its prey in Mountain View, California, last month.

"The photos show a male adult white-tailed kite carrying a vole. It is the prelude to a mid-air food exchange with one of its juvenile offspring," he says. "I found the expression of the vole to be quite striking, showing it was very scared and helpless, and appears to be looking at the camera directly."

Voles are small rodents that are closely related to hamsters, although they have a longer, hairier tail and a slightly rounder head. They aren't long-lived, with a lifespan of around three months, and have a long list of predators ranging from hawks and falcons to snakes, weasels, raccoons, and foxes. In short, seeing one in the clutches of a raptor is, unfortunately, not uncommon for these little, furry, largely subterranean mammals.



The vole might appear to be rather large in this photo, but it's unlikely that it is any bigger than five to nine inches long. Its size relative to the kite shows why it might look so big: white-tailed kites aren't particularly large or long-lived raptors, with even the average mid-sized kites measuring at most 17 inches long and the eldest recorded kite was estimated to have been [around six years old](#).

ADVERTISEMENT

The white-tailed kite is found all around the Americas, but isn't particularly common in the United States outside of a small region in southern Florida and Texas and the coastal and central regions of California and Oregon, usually seeking out grasslands or prairies.

"They generally start foraging just after dawn, when you'll likely catch them hovering into the wind with their head hanging down. You might also be able to catch them hovering in grassy fields at the edges of highways as you drive by," [All About Birds explains](#).



While voles don't emote with facial expressions like humans do, it's hard not to see a look of helplessness on its face in Lu's photo as it is carried away by the kite, likely to its demise. It joins a series of viral animal images in recent history, including a photographer's most [famous photo of a snow leopard that proves difficult to see](#), an epic [battle between a great blue heron and a banded water snake](#), another [heron stealing a baby alligator from its mother](#), a [hawk and owl fighting mid-air over a vole](#), and (perhaps most famous) [a "once in a lifetime photo" of a bobcat pouncing on and taking down a giant blue heron mid-flight](#).

Image credits: Photographs by Sha Lu

NEWS, SPOTLIGHT

ACTIONSHOT, BIRD, BIRDPHOTOGRAPHY, CALIFORNIA, KITE, TELEPHOTOLENS, VOLE, WHITETAILEDKITE, WILDLIFEPHOTOGRAPHY



PetaPixel articles may include affiliate links; if you buy something through such a link, PetaPixel may earn a commission.

RELATED ARTICLES

The Winning Images from the Audubon Photography Awards 2022

The Kite Photography of UC Berkeley Professor Charles Benton

The Captive Airship: George Lawrence's Panoramic Kite Photography Rig

This Picture Shows 102 Kite Boarders in One Frame

DISCUSSION

LOAD COMMENTS

BECOME A MEMBER

Become a PetaPixel Member and access our content ad-free.

SUBSCRIBE NOW

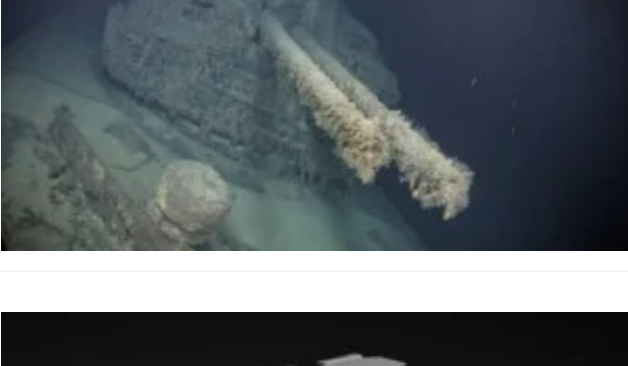
We and our [third parties](#) store and/or access information on a device, such as cookies and process personal data, such as unique identifiers and standard information sent by a device for personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development. With your permission we and our partners may use precise geolocation data and identification through device scanning. You may click to consent to our and our 1505 partners' processing as described above. Alternatively you may click to refuse to consent or access more detailed information and change your preferences before consenting. Please note that some processing of your personal data may not require your consent, but you have a right to object to such processing. Your preferences will apply to this website only and will be stored in IABGPP_HDR_GppString cookie for 13 months. You can change your preferences or withdraw your consent at any time by returning to this site and clicking the "Privacy" button at the bottom of the webpage.

Please note that this website/app uses one or more Google services and may gather and store information including but not limited to your visit or usage behaviour. You may click to grant or deny consent to Google and its third-party tags to use your data for below specified purposes in below Google consent section.



This 6.25 Gigabyte Photo of Pluto Took 15 Months to Send

JUL 16, 2025



Underwater Camera Captures First-Ever Images of Japanese WWII Warship

JUL 15, 2025



Sony's RX1R III Premium Compact Camera Arrives After Nearly 10 Year Wait

JUL 15, 2025