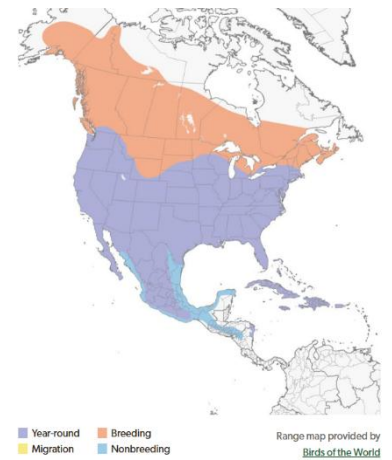


Red-tailed Hawk



Classification

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Accipitridae
Genus: *Buteo*
Species: *jamaicensis*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Most widely distributed hawk species in North America. Found in Alaska through Canada, the United States, Central America down to Panama, and the West Indies.
- **Habitat:** Open areas with scattered, elevated perching, such as parks, fields, pastures, plains, roadsides, grasslands, patchy forests, scrublands, deserts and in Mexico, tropical rainforests. They are also found in urban and suburban areas.
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern with numbers increasing.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 17 to 22 inches (43-56 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 3.5 to 4.5 feet (1-1.4 m)
- **Weight:** 1.5 to 3.25 pounds (680-1474 g)
- **Lifespan:** More than 20 years in the wild. The oldest in the wild was over 30 years of age, and in human care, they have been known to live at least 30 years.
- **Identifying Traits:** Large raptor with short, wide tail with brownish-red tail feathers (except for "Harlan's Hawk" color morph; see fun facts for more information). It has dark, light and intermediate forms. The light form has a brown head with white chest. Long, rounded and broad wings that are mostly brown from above and pale from below with dark wing tips and belly band. Wing linings are dark or brown. There is a dark color morph that is chocolate brown with a warm red tail, and a rufous color morph that has a reddish-brown chest with a darker belly. In young birds, the tail is brown and banded. Females are up to 25% larger than males.

Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Small to medium-sized mammals as well as some birds and reptile species. Mammals make up most of their diet, including squirrels, rabbits, hares, rats, mice, and voles. Prey items may weigh anywhere from less than an ounce to 5 pounds. Small rodents make up 80% to 85% of their diet.
- **Breeding:** Monogamous and generally only change mates when their original mate dies. The male and female soar in wide circles together calling to each other. The male will often perform dynamic aerial displays that include diving and stooping. After several swoops, the male will approach the female from above with extended legs and touch her briefly. Sometimes, pairs even grab onto one other and spiral towards the ground.
- **Nesting:** Build a stick nest in the crowns of tall trees and on cliffs as well as in man-made structures and tall buildings. Nests are lined with natural plant materials, such as pine needles and bark. Lay 1 to 5 eggs that take 28 to 35 days to incubate.
- **Migration:** Resident or short distance. Individuals that live in the more northern parts of the range (Alaska, Canada, and the northern Great Plains) migrate south during the winter for a few months. The orange portion of the range map above is the breeding area, and the light blue is non-breeding for those individuals that migrate.
- **Call:** Loud, high-pitched, hoarse, screaming whistle that sounds like “kee-eee-arr” and may sound very familiar due to the call being used in many movies and tv shows for most birds of prey, especially eagles.

Fun Facts!

- Known to take food from other species by harassing the bird carrying the prey until the bird drops the food, which is referred to as pirating.
- One of the largest birds you will observe in North America, yet even the largest female will weigh about 3 pounds. A similar sized dog in comparison might weigh 10 times that of a Red-tailed Hawk.
- There is a very dark form of this species, sometimes referred to as the “Harlan’s Hawk” that has a marbled white, brown, and gray tail instead of a red one. This color morph is found in Alaska and Northern Canada.
- Pairs are very territorial and will remain together in the same territory for years. The female is more aggressive around the nest site while the male is more aggressive around the territory boundaries. Territories may range in size from 0.5 to 2.5 square miles.



Importance

Help control populations of small mammals, including rodents and rabbits, which plays an important role in ecosystems. This is also helpful to farmers as rodents are known to destroy crops.

Threats and Conservation measures

Conservation status is of least concern and numbers have recovered following declines from DDT pesticide exposure in 1970s. While numbers are increasing, threats after habitat loss include car collisions, electrocutions and wind farms. Red-shouldered Hawks are admitted regularly to the CRC hospital following car collisions. To prevent car collisions, ask visitors to refrain from throwing food out of the car window as this attracts prey on the side of the road, such as rodents (<https://carolinaraptorcenter.org/raptor-hospital/>). Due to their flight and foraging behavior, they are more susceptible to collisions with windfarms than other birds. By painting one wind turbine rotor blade black, you can reduce the number of avian fatalities by over 70%. To reduce electrocutions, conservation centers are working with utility companies to retrofit existing power poles by installing insulating covers, installing perch shields and adding safe artificial nesting platforms.

Sources

- <https://peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/hawks/red-tailed-hawk>
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