

Red Shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)



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Physical Description:

Red-shouldered hawk is large. It's a broad-winged hawk, with long tail and heavy body. Adult has a brown head, a dark brown back and reddish underparts, with dark brown streaks. It has reddish shoulders and wings linings, and extensive pale spotting above. It shows dark streaks on reddish chest. Female is larger than male. Juvenile shows extensive variations. *Buteo lineatus* presents more finely streaked breast than others subspecies. It has creamy underparts with dark spots and streaks. The tail of both adult and juvenile is dark brown with white bands. Bill has yellow cere and black tip. Legs and feet are yellow. Eyes are brown.

Identification:

Length: 15-19 in.

Weight: 1.1-2 lbs.

Wingspan: 37-42 in.

- Sexes similar
- Short, dark, hooked beak
- Large, fairly long-tailed, broad-winged hawk
- Pale, translucent crescent at base of primaries

Adult:

- Brown head
- Reddish breast and underwing coverts
- Pale belly barred heavily with reddish
- Reddish lesser uppersecondary coverts appear as reddish shoulder at rest
- Flight feathers dark above with white barring
- Flight feathers pale below with dark barring
- Dark tail has several narrow white bars
- Florida birds (*B. l. extimus*) are paler about the head and have much paler breasts
- California (*B. l. elegans*) and Texas (*B. l. texanus*) birds are much richer red

Immature:

- Pale supercilium
- Brown head, back and upperwing coverts
- Small reddish patch on lesser secondary upperwing coverts
- Underwing mostly pale, with faint barring on flight feathers
- Dark brown tail with narrow buff bands

Hunting Strategies:

RSH search for prey while perched on a top-tree, or soaring over woodlands. When sight prey, they kill it by dropping directly onto it from the air. They can cache food near their nest for later. They use sight and hearing to hunt, but they don't smell.

The shape and structure of wings allow them to soar easily for long periods, searching for prey. The hawk's large eyes are situated to look forward. The birds must turn their heads to keep prey in view. They have a very sharp vision.

RSH's diet consists primarily of small mammals, such as rabbits and squirrels. They feed also reptiles and amphibians, such as snakes, lizards and frogs, and small birds and large insects too. They like crayfish in some regions.

Habitat and Range:

Red-shouldered hawk are often seen near water. It likes moist mixed woodlands. They prefer to have dead trees nearby, to perch and enjoy a good view of the ground.

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE: North America to central Mexico. It breeds throughout eastern and northeast US, into southern Canada, and west of the Sierra Nevada in California. Populations in the eastern US and California are resident. Populations breeding in the northeast US and southern Canada migrate to northern Mexico to winter.

Reproduction:

RSH are monogamous. Courtship displays begin on the breeding grounds. They soar together in broad circles while calling, or they soar and dive toward one another. Male may performs a "sky-dance", by soaring high in the air, and making some series of steep dives, followed by a wide spiral and rapid ascent. These flights occur in late morning and early afternoon.

RSH breeds once per year, between April to July. They often use the same nest from year to year. Both the male and female build or rework the nest. The nest is large and deep, constructed from sticks, twigs, shredded bark, leaves and green sprigs.

The female lays 3 to 4 white eggs with brown blotches, on 2 to 3 days. Incubation lasts for about 33 days, and begins with the first or second egg. Both parents incubate the eggs. Nestlings are brooded nearly constantly by female for at least a week. The male hunts and brings food to the

nest for female and nestlings, during nestling period, about approximately 6 weeks. Chicks are fed by both parents during 8 to 10 weeks more. They become independents at 17 to 19 weeks old. They may still roost in or near the nest at night. They begin breeding when they are 1 year old or later.

Lifespan / Longevity:

Average life span for red-shouldered hawks is 24 to 26 months.

Behavior:

Red-shouldered hawk is solitary and territorial. They don't form flocks even in winter. RSH male has a larger home range than female. Territory of both sexes is usually larger during winter than during the breeding season. (From 1 to 3, 4 square kilometres)
These birds use physical displays, such as courtship flights, and vocalizations to communicate.

Communication:

Red-shouldered hawk's call is an evenly spaced series of clear and high notes "kee-ah" or "kah". It's the most common call. This call announces that a territory is occupied, and when birds are alarmed. Seven different calls are recognized.