

Red-shouldered Hawk

Scientific Name: *Buteo lineatus*



Did You Know?

- Red-shouldered hawks have an unusual courtship ritual. They will fly together and occasionally roll over on their backs. They can be seen flying upside down for short distances!
- They build their nests high in the trees during the winter or early spring and often decorate their nests with various green plants.
- These hawks are not picky eaters! Just about any small mammal, reptile, large insect, and even other birds can be part of their meal.
- In flight, all ages and plumages display translucent white crescents at the wing tips.
- Their flight is accipiter like: *Flap, Flap, Glide*.
- The red-shouldered hawk is named for its reddish brown shoulder patches.
- In contrast to the red-tailed hawk, the red-shouldered hawk soars less and prefers to perch hidden in the cover of trees. They appear more slender/leaner than other hawks.
- In Georgia the Red-shouldered hawk is a year round resident.
- During courtship the red-shouldered hawk can be one of the noisiest raptors. It screams a repeated kee-yer, and its cries can be heard for miles. Some blue jays can imitate the call and may use it to frighten other birds from feeding stations. During flight this hawk gives a quick series of whistles that are slurred together.
- Being a secretive raptor, the red-shouldered hawk avoids the more open areas, which are favored by other hawks, and inhabits the woodlands along streams, river valleys, wet meadows, forested swamps, and damp woods. It sometimes makes its home near farmlands or in suburban neighborhoods.
- During the warmer months, red-shouldered hawks favor cold-blooded prey such as insects, crayfish, amphibians, and reptiles. In the winter, these raptors focus their hunger on small mammals and the occasional small bird. They typically hunt these warm-blooded creatures from a perch.

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General Information on Red-shouldered Hawks

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS

Slightly smaller than the red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawks are dark above with rufous streaking. Reddish patches on the wrist and upper back give the appearance of red shoulders. The underside is light with rufous barring on breast and belly. The tail is dark brown with four or five white bands and a white tip. The immature bird has less coloration at the shoulders and a tail that is indistinctly barred.

RANGE

Found in the eastern half of North America, generally south of the Great Lakes and east of central Minnesota. They are found as far south as Florida and northeastern Mexico. A separate population is found along the humid Pacific coast.

HABITAT

Red-shouldered hawks are usually found along river valleys and moist lowland woods. They compete with red-tailed hawks for nesting sites, and this may explain some of their distribution pattern, as they may be forced into closed canopy woods that the red-tailed hawk does not use.

NESTING

The nest is made of sticks and placed in a crotch high in a tree. Red-shouldered hawks reuse the same territory and nest if available in succeeding years.

FEEDING HABITS

Like the red-tailed hawk, this hawk will feed on a variety of prey, primarily small rodents, amphibians, and reptiles.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Once considered the most common hawk in the northeastern United States, this bird is thought to be declining in the east. It has been on the Audubon Society "Blue List" since 1972. The Blue List was designed to provide early warning of the North American species undergoing population or range reductions. Several states have listed this bird for special protection.