

Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Field Marks:

- length: 18-22 in (males) 20-26 in (females)
- wingspan: 45-49 in
- brick red tail with a dark band near the tip
- cream-colored chest with a dark belly band
- dark leading edge of the wing near the shoulder
- many variations in color occur which can make identification difficult



Breeding Range:

The Red-tailed Hawk breeds in all parts of the United States, most of Canada, and northern Central America.

Wintering Range:

This is the same as the breeding range except for individuals breeding at the northernmost latitudes. These individuals migrate to the middle and southern areas of the breeding range.

Habitat Preferences:

Red-tailed Hawks can be found in a wide variety of habitats including desert scrub, plains, agricultural fields, pastures, urban parks, coniferous and deciduous woodlands, and tropical rain forests. They are edge specialists, and concentrate in the transitional areas between habitat types. They prefer open areas with elevated perch sites and are frequently seen using power poles as hunting perches.

Nesting:

They are monogamous for the life of the pair. Nest building begins in late February or early March. Two eggs are laid, but only one nestling may survive if the food supply is low. Incubation typically lasts 28-35 days, and eggs are incubated by both parents. Young begin to leave the nest after approximately 46 days. Young remain in the nest area for 18-25 days after fledging, and begin hunting at 4 weeks. They are dependent on parents until 10 weeks after fledging.

Feeding:

Red-tailed Hawks are generalists, feeding on a wide variety of animals including voles, mice, rats, cottontails, ground squirrels, birds, and small reptiles including snakes. Fresh carrion is readily taken when available. They typically look for open areas with patches of woodland and prefer to hunt from high perches on the edge of an open hunting ground.

Conservation Status:

As a generalist, Red-tailed Hawks readily adapt to changes in their environment. Their population and range is increasing, and Red-tailed Hawks are inhabiting areas formerly occupied by Red-shouldered, Swainson's, and Ferruginous Hawks. Although populations are increasing, Red-tailed Hawks encounter many population threats including lead contamination from shotgun pellets in scavenged food, automobile collisions, electrocution from power lines, and human interference at nest sites.