



# THE LEGEND *of* PALE MALE

## *APPENDIX C*

# All About Red-tailed Hawks



- **Size & Shape**

Red-tailed hawks are large hawks with typical *Buteo* proportions: very broad, rounded wings and a short, wide tail. Large females seen from a distance might fool you into thinking you're seeing an eagle. (Until an actual eagle comes along.)

- **Color Pattern**

Most Red-tailed hawks are rich brown above and pale below, with a streaked belly and, on the wing underside, a dark bar between shoulder and wrist. The tail is usually pale below and cinnamon-red above, though in young birds it's brown and banded. "Dark-phase" birds are all chocolate-brown

with a warm red tail. “Rufous-phase” birds are reddish-brown on the chest with a dark belly.

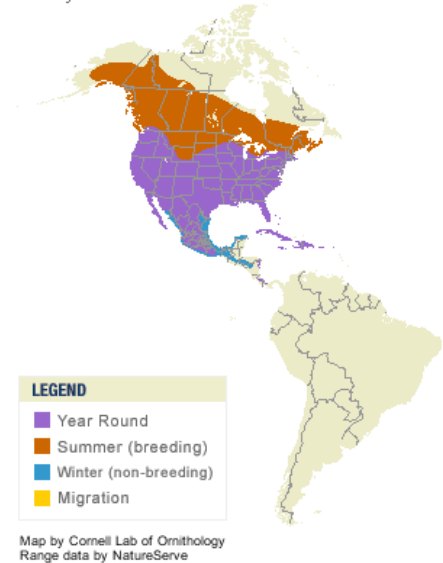
- **Behavior**

You’ll most likely see Red-tailed hawks soaring in wide circles high over a field. When flapping, their wing beats are heavy. In high winds they may face into the wind and hover without flapping, eyes fixed on the ground. They attack in a slow, controlled dive with legs outstretched – much different from a falcon’s stoop.

- **Habitat**

The Red-tailed hawk is a bird of open country. Look for it along fields and perched on telephones poles, fenceposts, or trees standing alone or along edges of fields

Red-tailed Hawk  
*Buteo jamaicensis*



## Cool Facts

- The Red-tailed hawk has a thrilling, raspy scream that sounds exactly like a raptor should sound. At least, that’s what Hollywood directors seem to think. Whenever a hawk or eagle appears onscreen, no matter what species, the shrill cry on the soundtrack is almost always a Red-tailed hawk.
- Birds are amazingly adapted for life in the air. The Red-tailed hawk is one of the largest birds you’ll see in North America, yet even the biggest females weigh in at only about 3 pounds. A similar-sized small dog might weigh 10 times that.
- The "Harlan's Hawk" breeds in Alaska and northwestern Canada, and winters on the southern Great Plains. This very dark form of the Red-tailed hawk has a marbled white, brown, and gray tail instead of a red one. It’s so distinctive that it was once considered a separate species, until ornithologists discovered many individuals that were intermediate between Harlan's and more typical Red-tailed hawks.
- Courting Red-tailed hawks put on a display in which they soar in wide circles at a great height. The male dives steeply, then shoots up again at an angle nearly as steep. After several of these swoops he approaches the female from above, extends his legs, and touches her briefly. Sometimes, the pair grab onto one other, clasp talons, and plummet in spirals toward the ground before pulling away.

- Red-tailed hawks have been seen hunting as a pair, guarding opposite sides of the same tree to catch tree squirrels.
- The oldest known Red-tailed hawk was 28 years 10 months old.

## **Backyard Tips**

You are unlikely to see this bird in your backyard (unless yours is a big one). Red-tailed hawks eat mostly mammals, so they are less likely to visit a popular feeder than a Cooper's or Sharp-shinned hawk is. It is very rare for a Red-tailed hawk to go after dogs or cats.

## **Find This Bird**

The best way to find a Red-tailed hawk is to go for a drive, keeping your eyes peeled along fenceposts and in the sky. Chances are good that the first hawk you see will be a Red-tailed hawk. Just make sure to look for the buteo shape (broad, rounded wings; short tail), then check field marks like the dark bars on the leading edge of the wing. Across most of the continent, Red-tails are more numerous in winter, when birds from the far north arrive to join the birds that live in your area year round. Learn more at: [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-tailed\\_Hawk/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-tailed_Hawk/id)