



# Red-tailed Hawk

## *(Buteo jamaicensis)*

The powerful red-tailed hawk is the most widespread and abundant hawk in North America. This large hawk is easily identifiable by its rufous (red) tail, which distinguishes adults and is highly visible in flight. The red-tailed hawk is also the most variable plumaged North American raptor. Its coloration varies from light to dark brown, and has a wide variety of streaking patterns on its chest. This hawk has a very distinctive call, a descending “keeeeer.”

### *Habitat & Diet*

The red-tailed hawk is adaptable to many habitats but is usually found in open country. It is often found near highways, which provide suitable habitat for hunting. The red-tailed also takes advantage of roadkill, “a fast meal.” The raptor’s diverse diet includes rodents, birds, reptiles, and rabbits. They nest in deciduous trees, or conifers.

### *Fascinating Facts*

This large member of the buteo family is most often seen flying the “thermals” or updrafts of hot air, in search of prey. An excellent hunter, the red-tailed hawk has developed a technique for preying on venomous snakes. Approaching the snake with its wings stretched out in front of it, the snake strikes the part of the bird closest to it—the tips of the wings, ending up with a mouthful of feathers. This gives the hawk just enough time to grab the snake’s head in its sharp talons and kill it, without being harmed.

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**Height:** 19-26 inches  
**Weight:** 2-4 pounds  
**Wingspan:** 4½ feet  
**Habitat:** Wooded areas near fields; open land  
**Range:** Throughout North America and Canada  
**Life Expectancy:** Up to 25



### *Status*

The broad spectrum of diet and its adaptability to environmental changes has made the red-tailed hawk one of the most abundant raptors in N. America. Though its populations are not in any danger, individuals frequently fall victim to vehicle collisions and human persecution.