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# Red-tailed Hawk

*Buteo jamaicensis*

**Class:** *Aves*

**Order:** Accipitriformes

**Family:** *Accipitridae*

**Characteristics:** One of the most recognized hawks across the Americas, they are named for the rust colored red tails of the adults. The coloration of red-tailed hawks can vary greatly based off their geographic location. The plumage of adults can range from black to brown to nearly white with white speckled bellies and red tails. Juveniles however, can be identified by their distinctive heavy streaking, barring on the wings, and lightly barred pale tail feathers ([All About Birds](#)). Red-tailed hawks are listed as second largest of the Buteo hawks. As with most hawks, the female is larger than the male weighing in at 3.8 lbs. with a wingspan of 4.8 ft.

**Behavior:** During courtship a paired male and female will fly in circles and calling to each other. During which the male will perform aerial displays by diving and sometimes capturing prey, which he will later hand off to the female midair ([The Peregrine Fund](#)). Red-tailed Hawks are very territorial and mated pairs will often remain within the same territory for many years. The males patrol the territory for intruders while the females guard the nesting site ([Nature Works](#)). Red-tailed Hawks are diurnal hunters that can often be spotted scoping out prey on a high perch. Once a prey item is found they can reach speeds of 20-40 mph while flying and accelerate up to 120 mph while diving ([LA Zoo](#)).

**Reproduction:** The breeding season for Red-tailed Hawks takes place in April and May of each year. Females will lay 1-5 eggs and are responsible for most of the egg incubation duties. During this period the male will hunt and feed her. Egg incubation lasts for roughly 28-35 days. Hatchlings will leave the nest after 6 weeks, typically staying close to the nesting site. Over the next two months the fledglings will continue to strengthen their flight muscles while relying on their parents to provide them with food ([Audubon](#)).

## **Diet:**

Wild: Rodents, rabbits, lizards, snakes and other birds.

Zoo: crickets, chicks, mice, rat, rabbit and special Bird of Prey diet.

**Conservation:** Populations have increased significantly since the Migratory Bird Treaty Act was expanded in 1972. They are listed as least concerned on the IUCN Conservation Status ([IUCN Red List](#)).

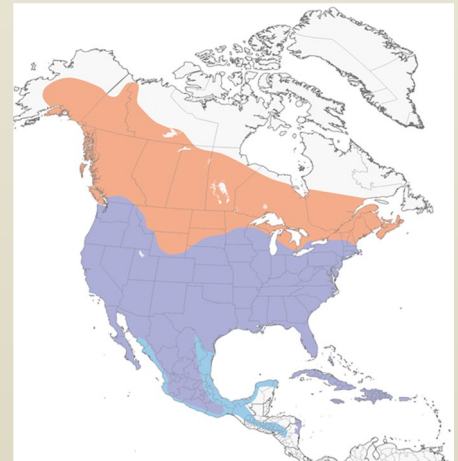
## **FYI:**

- The oldest known red-tailed hawk was found in Michigan and was at least 30 years old ([All About Birds](#)).
- Red-tailed hawk calls are often used to replace that of bald eagles in movies.
- Their scientific name *Buteo jamaicensis* stems from when the hawk was first recorded in Jamaica in 1781. ([Audubon](#)).



## **Range & Habitat:**

Found in a wide range of habitats across the Americas.



**Lifespan:** up to 20 years in captivity, 10-15 years in the wild.

## **Special Adaptations:**

**Kiting:** holding still against the wind on steady wings

## **IUCN Conservation Status:**

Least Concern

