

RED-TAILED HAWK

updated March 2017



Range	North America and Central America and the West Indies
Habitat	Open country, grasslands, scrub lands, rain forests
Diet (wild)	Mostly small mammals, including voles, mice, wood rats, rabbits, snowshoe hares, jack rabbits, and ground squirrels; birds, snakes, carrion. Individual prey items can weigh anywhere from less than an ounce to more than 5 pounds.
Diet (captivity)	Prey-based including dead mice, rats, and rabbits, occasionally small birds
Description	Length: 18–26 inches; wingspan: 3½–4½ feet; weight: 2–3¼ pounds. Like most raptors, females are larger than males. Most 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. There are many different morphs from light to dark; some don't even have the distinctive red tail.
Lifespan	About 20 years
Reproduction	1–5 eggs are incubated for 28–35 days. Nestlings fledge at 42–46 days. The male courts the female by circling at great heights and then diving and climbing. They will clasp talons, plummet to the earth, release, and fly away. The pair build the nest together and they will reuse their old nest if it was a successful site. The nest is made of sticks with bark and dried vegetation on the inside usually located in the crowns of tall trees or cliff ledges. Mated pairs typically stay together for life.
Behavior	Red-tailed hawks use their sharp talons to catch and kill their prey by soaring above fields and attacking in a slow controlled dive with legs out stretched. They are aggressive when defending territory; females are more aggressive around nests and males are more aggressive around boundary lines. Red-tailed hawks are diurnal and “niche-switch” with great horned owls.
Our animals	1 female. Born: 2008. Wild born in Michigan; injured and rehabilitated; unable to be released due to injuries to eye
Cool stuff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whenever a hawk or eagle appears on film or TV, no matter what species, the long raspy scream on the soundtrack is almost always that of a red-tailed hawk. • They frequently chase off other hawks, eagles, and great horned owls. • Red-tailed hawks are the second-largest hawk in North America, after ferruginous hawks. • Red-tailed hawks are often seen soaring in the sky, slowly turning circles on broad, rounded wings. • Red-tailed hawks have been seen hunting as a pair, guarding opposite sides of the same tree to catch squirrels. • The vision of hawks is estimated to be eight times as sharp as a humans. They have two foveas to our one. The fovea is responsible for sharp central vision in vertebrate eyes. Their foveas are so deep that they act as magnifiers. A hawk can see an object on the ground before we can even see the bird in the air. • You're unlikely to see this bird in your backyard. Red-tailed hawks eat mostly mammals so they're less likely to visit a backyard bird feeder than is a Cooper's or sharp-shinned hawk. It's very rare for a red-tailed hawk to go after dogs or cats.

Phylum
ChordataClass
AvesOrder
FalconiformesFamily
AccipitridaeGenus
Buteospecies
B. jamaicensis