

Red-shouldered Hawk

Buteo lineatus

Whether wheeling over a swamp forest or whistling plaintively from a riverine park, a Red-shouldered Hawk is typically a sign of tall woods and water. It's one of our most distinctively marked common hawks, with barred reddish-peachy underparts and a strongly banded tail. In flight, translucent crescents near the wingtips help to identify the species at a distance. These forest hawks hunt prey ranging from mice to frogs and snakes.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Red-shouldered Hawks are medium-sized, with broad, rounded wings and medium-length tails that they fan out when soaring. In flight, they often glide or soar with their wingtips pushed slightly forward, imparting a distinctive, "reaching" posture.

Color Pattern

Adults are colorful hawks with dark-and-white checkered wings and warm reddish barring on the breast. The tail is black with narrow white bands. Immatures are brown above and white below streaked with brown. All ages show narrow, pale crescents near the wingtips in flight.

Behavior

Red-shouldered Hawks soar over forests or perch on tree branches or utility wires. Its rising, whistled kee-rah is a distinctive sound of the forest. They hunt small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles either from perches or while flying.

Habitat

Look for Red-shouldered Hawks in deciduous woodlands, often near rivers and swamps. They build stick nests in a main crotch of a large tree. During migration, Red-shouldered Hawks often move high overhead along ridges or along the coast.

Cool Facts

- Red-shouldered Hawks return to the same nesting territory year after year. One Red-shouldered Hawk occupied a territory in southern California for 16 consecutive years.
- The oldest-known Red-shouldered Hawk was at least 22 years, 5 months old. It was banded in Florida in 1989, and found dead in Florida in 2009, the victim of an attack by another raptor.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 16.9 - 24.0 inches
- Wingspan - 37.0 - 43.7 inches
- Weight - 17.1 - 27.3 ounces

