

Red-shouldered Hawks are a common forest-dwelling hawk that favors woodlands near water. They are perhaps the most vocal American hawk.

There are five subspecies. The four eastern forms contact each other, but the west coast form is separated from the eastern forms by 1000 miles. The northern form is the largest.

The South Florida subspecies is the smallest and the palest of the five subspecies, having an entirely buff breast and stomach with very faint barring, and having a grayish head.

Some of the northern subspecies may migrate here during the winter and are identifiable by dark chests, a dark heads, and darker backs and wings. It may be confusing to visitors to see both subspecies in the same location.

Red-shouldered Hawk sizes range from 17-24 inches with a wingspan of 37-44 inches. The wings are distinguishable in the air by a pale crescent near each wing tip; the tail is striped black and white. The name "red-shouldered" comes from a rusty-red patch on the upper part (shoulder) of the wing. The sexes are similar although the female is slightly larger.

The most similar species is the Broad-winged Hawk, which has just one broad white band on its tail and is completely pale under the wings.

The juvenile Red-shouldered Hawk has an almost white breast with dark streaks. The bands on its tail are dark and light brown.

Scientists have identified seven separate songs; the most often heard is a loud *kee-aah* with the second note descending in pitch. The hawks call frequently.

Favored Red-shouldered habitats are mature deciduous or mixed deciduous-conifer swamps and forests.

Red-shouldered Hawks prefer lowlands, especially swampy woods and bogs, where they hunt by watching

## Red-shouldered Hawk

*Buteo lineatus*



Florida Red-shouldered Hawks breed once per year in the late winter/early spring. They often reuse previous nests with the male and female building or refurbishing the nest, which are typically 20 to 60 feet above the ground in the forks of branches of deciduous trees in wet woodland areas.

The nest is large and deep, constructed from sticks, twigs, shredded bark, and leaves. They prefer to have dead trees nearby, where they can perch and enjoy an unobstructed view of the swamp floor.

The female lays from two to five eggs over the course of two to three days. Incubation begins when the first or second egg is laid, and lasts for 33 days. Hatching is asynchronous, with up to seven days between the first and last chick. The nestlings are altricial, and are brooded nearly constantly by the female for at least a week.

The male brings food to the nest for the female and nestlings during the nestling stage, which lasts approximately six weeks. Chicks begin to leave the nest at six weeks, but are fed by the parents for another 8 to 10 weeks. Chicks become independent of the parents at 17 to 19 weeks. Still, they may continue to roost in or near the nest at night.

Red-shouldered Hawks can begin breeding when they are one year old. Although the average life span in the wild is a little over two years, the oldest known wild Red-shouldered Hawk lived almost 20 years.

quietly from a low perch and dropping down on to the prey. Favorite foods are snakes and frogs, supplemented with insects, small mammals and alligators, birds, turtles, amphibians, and crayfish.

It will watch small wading birds, especially White Ibis and Little Blue Herons, and if one catches a hawk-sized meal, it will suddenly swoop down and try to steal the food.

Red-shouldered Hawks are monogamous and territorial. Courtship displays occur on the breeding grounds and involve soaring together in broad circles while calling, or soaring and diving toward one another. These courtship flights usually occur in late morning and early afternoon.



northern subspecies



Florida subspecies



juvenile

- By the time they are five days old, nestling Red-shouldered Hawks can shoot their feces over the edge of their nest. Bird poop on the ground is a sign of an active nest.

- The clearing of forests over the last two centuries probably led to decreases in populations of the Red-shouldered Hawk while increasing habitat for the Red-tailed Hawk.