



red-tailed hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Falconiformes
Family: Accipitridae

FEATURES

The red-tailed hawk averages 19 to 25 inches in length. It has rounded wings. The large tail is rust-red and can be seen as the bird soars. The breast is white, and there are dark streaks on the belly. Melanistic (completely dark) red-tailed hawks may be seen. The immature red-tailed hawk has a gray tail that may or may not show bands.

BEHAVIORS

The red-tailed hawk is a common migrant, winter resident, summer resident and permanent resident statewide. Spring migration begins in February, and these birds are often seen gliding on thermals along waterways. Nesting takes place from February through May. The nest is built in a large tree and is placed 35 to 90 feet above the ground. The nest is made of sticks and lined with bark, moss and evergreen leaves. It may be reused in later years. Both the male and female construct the nest. Two to four white or light brown eggs with dark marks are laid by the female, who incubates them for the entire 28- to 32-day incubation period. The male brings food to the nest for her during this period. Fall migration begins in September. The red-tailed hawk lives in semiopen areas, woodlots and woodlands. It is often seen sitting along the road on fence posts or telephone poles or

in a tree at mid-height. Its call is "keeerrr." This bird eats cottontails, squirrels, mice, birds, reptiles and amphibians.

HABITATS

- bottomland forests
- coniferous forest
- southern Illinois lowlands
- upland deciduous forest

ILLINOIS STATUS

- common
- endangered
- threatened
- native
- exotic

ILLINOIS RANGE

Permanent resident: statewide

Summer resident: statewide

Migrant: statewide

Winter resident: statewide

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 1999.

Biodiversity of Illinois, Volume 2: Woodland Habitats CD-ROM.