

RED-TAILED HAWK



1. **Red-tailed Hawk**, *Buteo jamaicensis*, resting on a bluebird box at EastView, © Dick Harlow

There are birds of prey throughout the world. Here in North America we have Osprey, Hawks, Kites, Eagles and Allies. If we are discussing Hawks, then there are two primary groups: The Accipiter's and the Buteos.

Accipiter's feed mostly on birds, whereas Buteos feed mostly on mammals.

The Red-tailed Hawk is a Buteo, thus its scientific name *Buteo jamaicensis*.

The red-tail with its dark streaked belly band are characteristic of an adult Red-tail. However, immatures will show only some red in the tail, but will also have the streaked belly band.

There are various subspecies of the Red-tail especially in the mid-west and west that can be confusing to those seeing them for the first time and trying to identify them. For example the "Harlan's Hawk" especially the dark morph individuals found out west and close to the mid-west, have a dusky dark appearance. Here in the east what you see in these pictures is what you get, a very characteristic Red-tailed Hawk looking like most of what the references describe.

Throughout our country the Red-tailed Hawk is our most common hawk. Our eastern Red-tails like mixed woods that are near open land, whether the open land are fields or agricultural land. They will feel at home in a rural, a suburban or even a city situation, acclimating to human environments.

JANUARY 01- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES
By Dick Harlow



2. Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, standing over a killed vole. © Dick Harlow

Their primary food source is rodents, but they will also feed on reptiles and even amphibians. They will not pass up another bird if it is an easy catch.



3. Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, feeding on a killed vole. © Dick Harlow

Pictures #2-4 were taken December 25th after abnormally high temperatures brought on a rainstorm that removed all the snow we had had from a previous winter storm. Picture #3 shows this Red-tail feeding on a vole that it had captured. Unfortunately, the grass is hiding the view of the vole.

JANUARY 01- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES
By Dick Harlow



4. Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, standing over a killed vole. © Dick Harlow

As this hawk is one of our larger eastern hawks, its aerial display during courtship is something to behold if you ever get the chance to view it.

I have only seen this behavior twice in my life where the male flies in circles along with the female high in the sky. Once I got a glimpse of the male passing a prey item to the female while in flight. Simply spectacular!



5. Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*, © Karen Bennett

How to age a Red-tailed Hawk. The belly band is fairly consistent with age. However, the tail is another story. "Cornell's Birds of North America" says that a small percentage of immature Red-tails in their first year will molt into adult basic plumage. However, generally it takes two years. Some Red-tails may take three years to completely form its very reddish russet tail with bars. Sometimes it takes into its third winter before the red in the tail is significant enough to be fully adult and thus the bird is ready to breed.

Remember to look for the streaked belly band and the barred red tail. Some red with the barred tail means you are looking at a first- or second-year bird depending on the amount of red in the tail.

JANUARY 01- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES
By Dick Harlow

OBSERVATIONS

MAMMALS

Fox, possible Red Fox
Gray Squirrel
Meadow Vole

Weather Tidbits

Month of DECEMBER 01-14, 2020

All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).

PRECIPITATION

Average January Precipitation for Middlebury, VT = 2.05 inches.

First Two Weeks Precipitation = 16.4 mm of snow or a water content of 0.65 inches. A deficit of 1.4 inches so far this month.

Overcast Days: 14

Overcast Days: We had 14 days, two weeks of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 4 days produced snow.