

red-tailed hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Accipitridae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

The red-tailed hawk averages 19 to 25 inches in length. It has rounded wings. The large tail has rust-red feathers and can be seen as the bird soars. The breast feathers are white, and there are dark streaks on the belly feathers. Melanistic (completely dark) red-tailed hawks may be seen. The immature red-tailed hawk has gray tail feathers 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, mosses 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.

ILLINOIS RANGE





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adult





Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests; coniferous forests; southern Illinois lowlands;
upland deciduous forests

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none