



Red-tailed Hawk

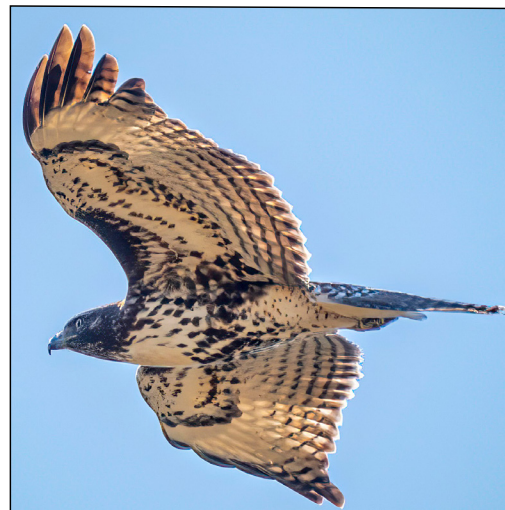
**PHOTOS BY JAMES KENDALL,
ESSAY BY BETTY KANNE**

The Red-tailed Hawk is one of the most conspicuous and widespread large birds of prey in North America. If you spot a big solitary raptor perched high in erect posture along a roadside or field edge, it's quite likely a Red-tailed Hawk. It thrives in open woodlands and fields where it can be seen lazily soaring in a circular pattern riding the upward thermals while keenly watching the ground for rodents, rabbits, lizards or other scurrying prey that comprise its carnivorous diet. Immediately upon sighting prey while circling as high as 100 feet in the air, the Red-tailed Hawk "stoops", folding its wings, entering into a high speed aerial dive, seizing the unwitting target at high velocity impact with its lethally powerful talons.

They may also employ a patient, vigilant hunting technique as they perch silently atop trees, telephone poles, or building edges, keenly surveying their hunting grounds, poised and ready to strike suddenly when likely prey appears. The hawk's eyesight is eight times more powerful than that of a human.

Its well recognized haunting call is a hoarse, rasping scream that has routinely served as the iconic desolate soundscape in Western cowboy movies for generations.

Red-tail Hawks typically mate for life and the pair carefully craft a sturdy nest of sticks high in a leafy treetop where the substantially larger female lays and incubates 2-4 eggs carefully tended by both parents until



successfully fledged 4-6 weeks after hatching. Juvenile hawks will continue to stay close to the nest to be aided by their attentive parents for another two months before achieving full independence as a reliably capable hunter.

Adult red-tailed hawks have few predators, but Great Horned Owls and crows readily prey on Red-tailed Hawk eggs and nestlings. Under favorable circumstances they can be expected to live an average of twenty years in the wild.

Red-tailed hawks are considered symbols of strength, courage, and wisdom in Native American folklore and are often heartily welcomed as harbingers of good fortune.

