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Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*

With its conspicuous soaring and loud defiant screams, the Red-tailed Hawk is a familiar bird throughout most of Florida. It is a broadly distributed North American breeder, nesting throughout much of Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

Habitat. The Red-tailed Hawk is commonly found in mixed forest and farmlands, but the species inhabits the greatest diversity of habitats of any North American hawk (Brown and Amadon 1968, Gates 1972, Bednarz and Dinsmore 1982). A woodland-grassland mosaic provides suitable open country for foraging and woodland nest sites.

Food habits of this opportunistic species reflect the relative availability of prey in a given area, but its diet is typically dominated by small mammals such as mice, rats, squirrels, and rabbits (Orde and Harrell 1977, Palmer 1988, Toland 1990a).

Most Red-tailed Hawks select wooded uplands as nest sites, but in Florida they sometimes nest in cypress tree islands, Australian pine shelter-belts, residential areas, or on power poles (Toland 1990b). The nest is a bulky, flat-topped structure of coarse sticks, and its diameter is frequently greater than 76 cm (30 in). One to 3 (typically white eggs, sometimes marked with brown, are laid and incubated for 32 to 34 days. The young fledge at 43 to 47 days of age (Palmer 1988).



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Seasonal Occurrence. In Florida, the Red-tailed Hawk begins breeding in February, and nesting extends through June (Kale and Maehr 1990).

Status. The largest breeding hawk in the state, the Red-tailed Hawk is represented by 2 breeding subspecies. *B. j. borealis* breeds in the Panhandle and extreme northern peninsula, and *B. j. umbrinus* occurs throughout most of the peninsula (Brown and Amadon 1968, Clark 1987, Palmer 1988).

The Red-tailed Hawk is a widely distributed breeding species in Florida. It is uncommon to common throughout the state, except for the southern tip of the peninsula and in the Keys. The birds are relatively easy to locate because of their habit of perching conspicuously in large, solitary trees, snags, or on power poles. Breeding pairs perform elaborate courtship displays, which include mutual soaring and calling, sky dancing, leg dangling, talon grasping, barrel rolls, and mutual high-perching. For these reasons, it is fairly easy to obtain "probable" breeding evidence for Red-tailed Hawks; although, approximately 12% of territorial pairs do not nest each year (Palmer 1988, Toland 1990a). Confirming breeding is usually difficult, however, due to the bird's large territory size.

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Red-tailed Hawk

