

Living with **Raptors**

General information

Birds of prey, also called raptors, include hawks, eagles, falcons, owls, kites, ospreys and vultures. These birds are beneficial neighbors because they feed on insects, lizards, snakes and small rodents. Each spring and summer, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) receives reports of raptors diving at people. These incidents, usually involving hawks, have happened in both urban and suburban areas. Most of these events occur during the nesting season and near an active nest where chicks or eggs are present.

Raptors will dive or swoop at people and pets who come too close to their nest, within about 150 feet, because they view people and pets as threats to their young. In most cases, raptors dive at people but don't make contact. However, they can cause injuries if they do make contact.

While raptors will dive at small dogs that get too close to their nests, most small dogs are too heavy to be carried off by raptors. However, the FWC recommends keeping pets on a leash and keeping a close eye on them, even in a fenced yard.



Red-shouldered hawk, © Patricia Kuhn/Shutterstock.com



Red-shouldered hawk, © Mircea Costina/Shutterstock.com

How to identify nests

Most raptors build large nests, which can be made of sticks and Spanish moss. They are often built in the center of tall trees, like pines or oaks, which can support the weight of a large nest. Raptors are typically active around their nest sites, bringing in nesting material and food, and incubating eggs in the nest. Often, they will call loudly near their nests. Hearing these birds calling close by a large tree in the spring and summer months can be a good indicator that you're close to a nest.

Some species, like American kestrels and screech owls, prefer to nest in cavities. Other species, like ospreys, will nest on dead trees and man-made structures, like billboards, power poles and platforms. Both ospreys and eagles are known to nest on cell towers.

What can be done to prevent conflicts with nesting raptors?

- Be aware of your surroundings. Raptors vocalizing, flying low or circling above a tree or other structure could be an indication you are too close to a nest.
- Avoid areas near the nest, if possible. If you must go through the area where the birds have been acting defensively, carry an open umbrella or wear a hard hat. Or, temporarily erect a shade structure to obstruct the birds' view of people and pets.
- Try using an air horn to deter birds that start to dive.
- Eliminate attractants that may attract prey such as rodents into your yard. Items like unsecured garbage, bird seed and pet food are common household attractants that may entice prey species onto your property.
- During the non-breeding season, trim branches to eliminate perches and help resolve recurring issues.
- If you're a landowner, place signage on the property indicating nesting raptors are in the area, or temporarily block public access near a nest site.



Legal status

All Florida raptors are protected under the federal [Migratory Bird Treaty Act](#) and under Florida law. This means the birds, their nests, and their eggs are protected by federal and state law. Inactive nests, those with no young or eggs present, of non-listed species can be removed without a permit (Rule 68A-16.003). Nests of eagles, crested caracaras, snail kites and American kestrels cannot be removed under this rule. If a raptor nest is active with eggs or chicks in the nest, removal permits are needed from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Who can I contact for additional assistance?

If you are injured by a raptor, seek assistance from your medical care provider.

For an **active** nest removal permit (nests with eggs or young present), you must apply for a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permit. Further information on the Federal Migratory Bird Depredation Permit.

If you do not have access to the internet or have permit questions contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services. (866-487-3297).



American kestrel, © Brian Lasenby/Shutterstock.com

If you have further questions or need more help, call your regional Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission office:

Regional Offices

Northwest Region

3911 Highway 2321
Panama City, FL 32409-1659
850-265-3676

North Central Region

3377 East U.S. Highway 90
Lake City, FL 32055-8795
386-758-0525

Northeast Region

1239 S.W. 10th Street
Ocala, FL 3441-0323
352-732-1225

Southwest Region

3900 Drane Field Road
Lakeland, FL 33811-1299
863-648-3200

South Region

8535 Northlake Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33412
561-625-5122

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission Regional Offices

