

Red-Tailed Hawks

Imagine you're out in a vast, grassy field. You see rolling hills of green contrasted by a cloudless and vivid blue sky; there may even be a few sky-scraping trees scattered about. As you scan the horizon, studying each curve of the landscape, you spy something in the sky and suddenly you hear a familiar raspy scream! The elegant shadow immediately dives toward the earth like an arrow towards a target. The silhouette falls with deadly accuracy. In just a few short seconds the predator has captured its prey. With the bright sun now behind you, you're able to see the broad rounded wings, powerful talons and the distinct red tail feathers that define this magnificent bird of prey, the Red-tailed Hawk.

Have you ever seen a Red-tailed Hawk? Chances are pretty high that you have, but you might not have known it. The Red-Tailed Hawk is the most common hawk in North America. Its habitat ranges all the way from Canada down to Jamaica and Costa Rica. This amazing bird is present year-round all across the United States, so it can be spotted on every Amtrak trip.

Because it's so common, the Red-tailed Hawk has greatly influenced our North American culture and history. These birds of prey have played a role in Native American culture, modern falconry and even the movie scene! The importance of this hawk to Native Americans stems from their belief that the feathers are sacred and that the hawk is an omen or an example of wisdom and foresight. Red-tailed Hawk feathers are often used in religious ceremonies. Native Americans greatly respect the hunting skills of the hawk and throughout history this bird and other species of birds of prey have been trained to hunt. Currently Red-tailed Hawks are the most common bird used in falconry.

The eyesight of a Red-tailed Hawk is 2 to 3 times better than the average human and their talons can apply up to 200 pounds per square inch of pressure, whereas the average human hand can only apply about 90 pounds. These birds are easily trained, docile in captivity and easily returned to the wild. Interestingly, the majority of movies featuring a hawk, eagle or any bird of prey, almost always use the raspy scream of a Red-Tailed Hawk. This magnificent animal is the epitome of a bird of prey. If you pass a large open area during the day, keep your eyes peeled and see if you can spot a Red-tail soaring in the sky or perched atop a telephone pole searching for rodents, reptiles or other food.

Source(s):

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Author(s):

Written by David West (Undergraduate Student) and edited by Susan G. Scott (Lecturer) in the Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences at Texas A&M University, as part of a National Park Service Trails and Rails project funded by Amtrak, 2011.