



Red-shouldered Hawk

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(*Buteo lineatus*)

OVERVIEW

Red-shouldered Hawks are large buteos, slightly smaller than Red-tailed Hawks. They have long, somewhat broad wings that are slightly squared at the tips and held flat when soaring and drooped when gliding. Red-shouldered Hawks are steady in flight and display quick, snappy wing beats similar to those of Broad-winged Hawks but somewhat “wristy” and less stiff in comparison. There are several races of the Red-shouldered Hawk, but only two are migratory: Eastern (*B.l. lineatus*) and California (*B.l. elegans*), which is a short-distance migrant.

PLUMAGE

Eastern juveniles are pale underneath with dark streaking on the body that varies in extent but is typically evenly dispersed. Eastern juveniles can show a faint rufous wash to the underwing coverts that is sometimes obvious but can fade by spring. The tail has indistinct banding with a wider dark sub-terminal band similar to that of juvenile Broad-winged Hawks. The upperside of juvenile Easterns is brown; some exhibit faint rufous shoulder patches on the upperwings, which are much less distinct than on adults. **All Red-shouldered Hawks have pale, comma-shaped panels near the wing tips.** These commas are obvious from above, but can be inconspicuous from below in poor lighting. The primary commas on Eastern juveniles are buffy on top; on California birds they are white. *California juveniles* show

dense rufous-brown barring and streaking underneath similar to that of the adult plumage. **California juveniles also have adult-like boldly banded flight feathers, especially the tail.**

Adult Red-shouldered Hawks are brilliant rufous underneath with faint white barring and black streaking on the body, appearing orange overall at a distance. California adults are more vibrant in color underneath than Eastern adults. The flight feathers (including the tail) are banded black and white. **From above, adult Red-shouldered Hawks are brownish with rufous shoulder patches, and the boldly banded flight feathers are obvious.** By spring, some adults can be paler than usual due to fading, especially on the head and underbody.

The plumage of juvenile Broad-winged and Eastern Red-shouldered Hawks can be extremely similar, especially at a distance. The best way to tell the two species apart is by overall shape. **Broad-winged Hawks have stocky bodies and wings, and always show pointed wing tips.** Red-shouldered Hawks have longer, less tapered wings. Broad-winged Hawks hold their wings straight out when soaring, while Red-shouldered Hawks push their wings slightly forward. In a glide, the wing tips of Red-shouldered Hawks protrude farther past the trailing edge of the wings than do those of Broad-winged Hawks. **The tails of Broad-winged Hawks when folded are narrow, similar to those of Sharp-shinned Hawks; the tails of Red-shouldered Hawks are broader and more similar to those of other buteos.**



RS 01 - Juvenile Eastern Red-shouldered Hawks are pale underneath with modest streaking on the body, translucent commas near the wing tips, and fairly long, broad, squared-off wings (top left). In fair light (top right), in poor light (middle left), or when backlit (middle right), the pale wing commas of juveniles are often visible, but may be impossible to see when shadowed (bottom left); note the short wings compared to those of the Red-tailed Hawk. Red-shouldered Hawks glide on drooped, square-cut wings (juvenile, bottom right).



RS 02 - Adult Red-shouldered Hawks are rufous on the underbody with dark flight feathers showing a dark trailing edge and black-and-white banded tails (top left). The pale wing commas on **adults** are obvious when backlit (top right), but can be impossible to see when shadowed (middle left) or in a glide (middle right). Head-on, **adults** show rufous chests and pale faces; note the drooped, squared wings (bottom left). In poor light, **adults** can appear dark underneath, but the wing commas may be visible (bottom right); note the somewhat long tail.



RS 03 - California juveniles are marked rufous-brown underneath similar to adults, but are more heavily marked on the chest and lack a dark trailing edge on the wings (top left, right). California adults are uniform pale rufous underneath with a dark trailing edge on the wings (middle left); the black-and-white banded tail of California adults and juveniles is similar. Eastern juveniles are brown on top with buffy wing commas (middle right); California juveniles have blackish flight feathers, and white wing commas (bottom left). Adults of all races have boldly banded wings and tails and rufous shoulders (bottom right).