



RAPTORS OF OHIO **field guide**

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE



INTRODUCTION

Raptors can be found throughout Ohio in habitats that range from dense forests to open fields, from the wildest parts of the state to the skyscrapers of our largest cities, and from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. Many are year-round residents of Ohio, while others migrate from the south each spring. A broad-winged hawk you see picking out a nest site may have just arrived, having traveled from deep in South America. A soaring turkey vulture may have spent the winter scavenging armadillos in Mexico. Some species of hawks may be seen just about everywhere during all seasons of the year, but others are more elusive and must be sought after. During the colder months, Ohio is also the wintering grounds for some birds that prefer northern climates.

Unfortunately, the populations of most raptors underwent serious declines during the mid-20th century as a result of widespread pesticide contamination. By the early 1970s, many species had disappeared from Ohio or were limited to a few isolated pairs. The most famous example is the bald eagle. In 1979, there were only four nesting pairs of bald eagles left in the state. Thanks to conservation efforts here in Ohio and nationwide, raptors have greatly rebounded.

Seeing a raptor soaring serenely high in the sky adds to our appreciation for the natural world. Fortunately for us, Ohio has a wide diversity of raptor species to observe.

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

In-flight image

Common name

Overview

Habitat and food source description

Scientific name

Family name

Underside illustration with key markings

Perched Image

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RAPTORS OF OHIO

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RAPTORS IN OHIO



MERLIN
by Tim Daniel ©

A raptor exhibits physical adaptations that make it a highly efficient predator. Generally light in weight, yet powerful for its size, a raptor has sharp talons (or claws) and a sharp, hooked beak that suits its carnivorous lifestyle. Even the shape of its wings reflects the hunting technique that each species uses. A falcon, which uses a burst of speed to hunt other birds, tends to have narrower wings with more pointed tips. On the other hand, a vulture has broader wings. Its diet mainly consists of the carcasses of dead animals, so hunting speed is not necessary.

The eyes are a raptor's most marvelous adaptation. A raptor's eyes are positioned on its head to be forward-facing with overlapping fields of vision. Eyes in this arrangement give a hawk binocular vision, allowing it to judge distances with amazing accuracy. Binocular vision is essential for animals that hunt to survive, especially when pursuing fast-moving prey where the distance is constantly changing. The eyes of a raptor are

structured somewhat like a telescope. Evidence indicates that a raptor can distinguish its prey at two to three times the distance that a human can.

Most species of raptors survive by hunting one or more types of live animals for food. Other species survive by consuming animals that have already died, while still other species use a combination of hunting for live food and scavenging for dead animals. Predators help maintain the dynamic balance between habitats and the plant and animal life those habitats are capable of supporting. As predators and scavengers, raptors form vital links in the web of life.

Although owls are also raptors, they are not included in this field guide. The ODNR Division of Wildlife has a separate Owls of Ohio field guide, available at wildohio.gov.



AMERICAN KESTREL

Clutch size: 4-5 eggs
Incubation period: 26-32 days
Nestling period: 28-31 days

photo by Nine Tomorrows ©

RAPTOR BROODS

BLACK VULTURE

Clutch size: 1-3 eggs
Incubation period: 38-39 days
Nestling period: 70-98 days

TURKEY VULTURE

Clutch size: 1-3 eggs
Incubation period: 28-40 days
Nestling period: 60-84 days

MISSISSIPPI KITE

Clutch size: 1-3 eggs
Incubation period: 29-32 days
Nestling period: 25-35 days

OSPREY

Clutch size: 1-4 eggs
Incubation period: 36-42 days
Nestling period: 50-55 days

RED-TAILED HAWK

Clutch size: 1-5 eggs
Incubation period: 28-35 days
Nestling period: 42-46 days

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK

Clutch size: 2-5 eggs
Incubation period: 32-40 days
Nestling period: 42-49 days

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

Clutch size: 1-5 eggs
Incubation period: 28-31 days
Nestling period: 35-42 days

NORTHERN HARRIER

Clutch size: 4-5 eggs
Incubation period: 28-36 days
Nestling period: 30-35 days

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

Clutch size: 3-8 eggs
Incubation period: 30-35 days
Nestling period: 21-28 days

COOPER'S HAWK

Clutch size: 2-6 eggs
Incubation period: 30-36 days
Nestling period: 27-34 days

PEREGRINE FALCON

Clutch size: 2-5 eggs
Incubation period: 29-32 days
Nestling period: 35-42 days

MERLIN

Clutch size: 4-5 eggs
Incubation period: 28-32 days
Nestling period: 29 days

GOLDEN EAGLE

Clutch size: 1-3 eggs
Incubation period: 41-45 days
Nestling period: 45-81 days

BALD EAGLE

Clutch size: 1-3 eggs
Incubation period: 34-36 days
Nestling period: 56-98 days

source: Allaboutbirds.org

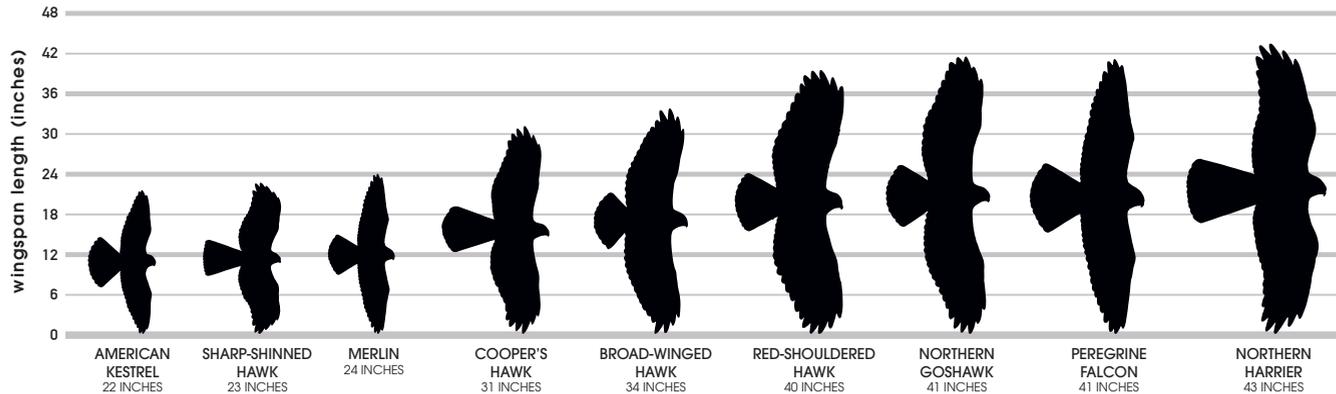
HOW TO IDENTIFY RAPTORS

Raptor identification can be a tricky pastime, but a few tips might help ease the challenge. When focusing eyes to the skies, one might be compelled to glance at the bird and then quickly grab a field guide, frantically searching dozens of pages for the right candidate. The field guide isn't going anywhere, but the bird will likely not stick around. Look at the bird as much as possible and reference resource material later. Make notes if there's worry of forgetting details.

Raptor enthusiasts are often drawn to plumage and size right away in order to try and identify a bird of prey, but first consider the shape. In relation to the body, are the wings long and pointy, or short and round? Is the tail long and narrow, or short and stubby?

Next, try to identify the colors or tones of the bird. Lighting can be as equally helpful as much as it can be tough, but at least consider whether the coloration is light or dark, and if any streaking is present. Distinctions or notable features might help distinguish one species from another.

Then, watch the bird's behavior and consider the habitat. The manner in which it flies (wingbeats, for example) will narrow down the species, as will the environment in which it is cruising or perched. Is the bird hunting over water, cruising a field, or flying by a backyard bird feeder? These details are important.

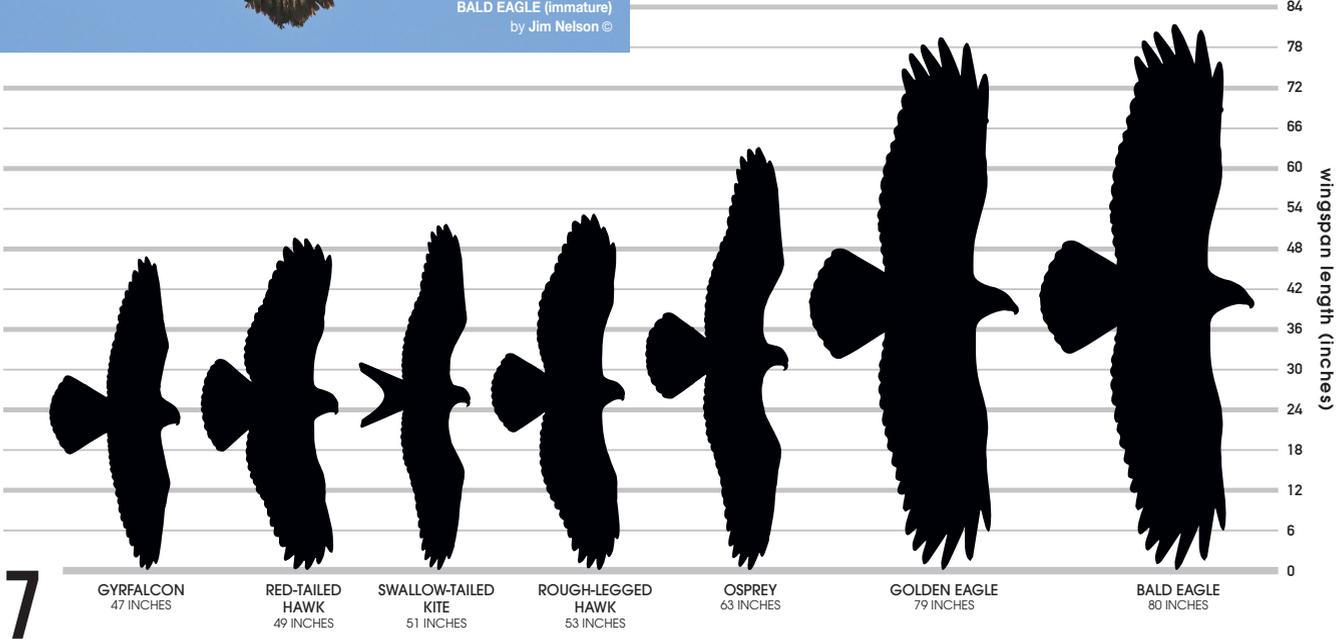




BALD EAGLE (immature)
by Jim Nelson ©

Other noteworthy raptor characteristics to keep in mind: females tend to be larger than males in most species. Males and females of the same species might appear completely different. Finally, adult and immature plumages are frequently quite different, making identification even more challenging (immatures tend to be more brown or have streaked feathers).

Best wishes in your raptor watching adventures.



RAPTOR TYPES

VULTURES

Ohio has two species of vultures (commonly but incorrectly referred to as buzzards): the turkey vulture and the black vulture. These birds are not true raptors because they don't technically seize quarry in the same fashion as birds of prey. However, they are grouped together because of their overall appearance and similarities.



TURKEY VULTURE
by Tim Daniel ©

OSPREY

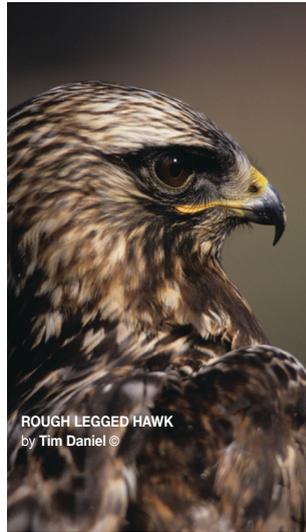
The osprey is a large, long-legged, eagle-like bird with distinctive wing shapes and dark eye-lines. It has specialized adaptations to help it catch fish, its preferred food. Adaptations include reversible outer toes and sharp spicules on the toes which help to grasp slippery fish.



OSPREY
by John L. Absher ©

BUTEOS

If you asked someone what a hawk looks like, there is a good chance that person would describe a buteo, known as a soaring hawk. Their powerful builds, robust bodies, broad wings, and wide, rounded tails embody many people's image of a hawk. In fact, the name buteo comes from the Latin word for hawk.



ROUGH LEGGED HAWK
by Tim Daniel ©

CIRCUS

Multiple species worldwide belong to this group, but just one that applies to North America, the northern harrier. Long, narrow wings are often held in a strong dihedral during flight. Wingbeats are deep, fluid, and relaxed.



NORTHERN HARRIER
by Hayley Crews ©



COOPER'S HAWK
by Arto Hakola ©

ACCIPITERS

Accipiters are highly maneuverable, swift-flying, short-winged hawks. They are sometimes called bird hawks because their diet consists mostly of other birds. Look for these sneaky predators scouting out backyard bird feeders. Unlike falcons, their hunting style uses stealth while near the prey's cover. Their short, broad wings give them the ability to attack into heavy vegetation, and a long tail compensates for the steering ability lost because of shorter wings.

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GOLDEN EAGLE
by Tim Daniel ©

EAGLES

The two eagle species found in Ohio are the bald eagle and golden eagle. Both are large, mostly dark birds with proportionally long wings. A 7-foot wingspan helps to differentiate them from other large raptors. They soar and glide with ease despite carrying a bulky body weight of 12 pounds or more. In flight, wings are held nearly horizontal. Powerful beaks are prominent when viewed from afar.



PEREGRINE FALCON
by Tim Daniel ©

FALCONS

There are three species of falcons likely to be seen in Ohio. All have bullet-like heads, short necks, pointed wings, and long tails. They are swift on the wing, preferring open habitats where they chase down other birds in mid-air. Wingtips usually reach more than halfway down the tail on perched birds.



MISSISSIPPI KITE
by Matt Cuda ©

KITES

These mid-sized birds appear buoyant in flight and feature long tails and slender bodies. Direct flights consist of deep, easy, and fluid wingbeats. They soar frequently and hold their wings flat or bowed. Observing their foraging behavior can help with identification. These acrobatic birds are known to twist their wings and tails while chasing insects.



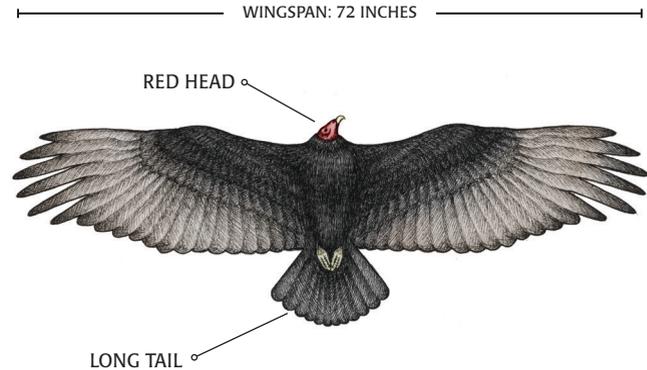
photo by: Russ Heint ©

TURKEY VULTURE

Cathartes aura

VULTURES

The turkey vulture is a large, dark bird with long, broad wings. Bigger than most other Ohio raptors, it has finger-like feathers at the wingtips and a long tail that extends past the feet in flight. The underside of the flight feathers (along the trailing edge and wingtips) are pale, giving a two-toned appearance. Besides the difference in color of a featherless head, a turkey vulture also has a shorter neck and longer, slimmer tail than the black vulture. Hollow stumps, rock crevices, and barn lofts are ideal nesting locations, and both adults help incubate the eggs. The birds roost communally in tall trees, where they remain through the morning until breezes stir or until temperatures are warm enough to create the thermal updrafts of air needed to sustain flight. When flying, a turkey vulture usually soars in circles to stay within an air thermal. It tilts slowly and gracefully from side to side, occasionally flapping its large wings. The species is common throughout the state. Most turkey vultures migrate to the southeastern U.S. during the winter, although some may remain in Ohio.



HABITAT

This consummate scavenger is common along roadsides and around suburbs, farm fields, landfills, and construction sites. On sunny days, the bird can be spotted soaring from early morning on. In colder weather and at night, they roost together on poles, towers, tall trees, and fence posts.

FOOD SOURCE

A well-developed sense of smell aids in its ability to locate carrion from considerable heights and distances. Freshly dead creatures are preferred, but it must wait for the meal to soften in order to pierce the skin.

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photo by: Anatolij Lukich ©





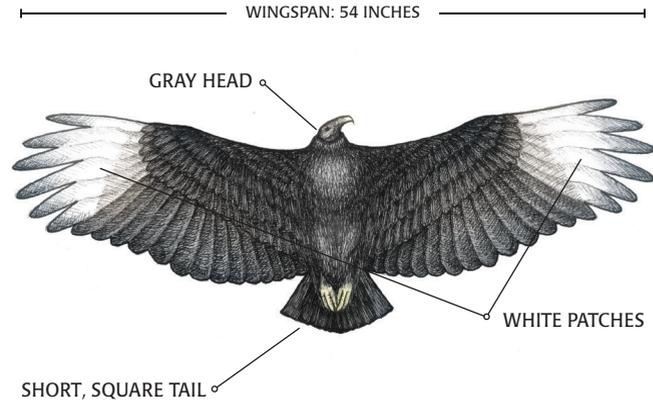
photo by: Rafael Felipe ©

BLACK VULTURE

Coragyps atratus

VULTURES

A black vulture can be described as elegant, as long as you don't get too close. With smoky black plumage and a bare grayish-black head, a black vulture looks well-dressed. In flight, it can be identified by its short, square tail that extends just beyond the back edge of the wings, and large white patches near the tips of its wings. It flies with rapid flaps and short glides, locating food primarily by sight rather than smell. They are family-oriented birds, roosting communally year-round in large groups of related individuals or joining up with other extended families. It is believed that the birds can communicate with each other in these large groups about the location of food sources. The sooty scavenger shares food with relatives, feeding young for months after they've fledged. The black vulture is monogamous, staying with its mate for many years, year-round. It mostly nests in dark cavities (caves, hollow trees, and abandoned buildings). It winters within the U.S., and some may even remain in Ohio.



HABITAT

Found more commonly in southern Ohio counties, the black vulture prefers open lowland areas and avoids heavily forested regions. It typically nests and roosts in wooded areas.

FOOD SOURCE

Carrion is the preferred diet, but the black vulture is known to occasionally kill skunks and opossums.

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photo by: Dagmara Ksandrova ©





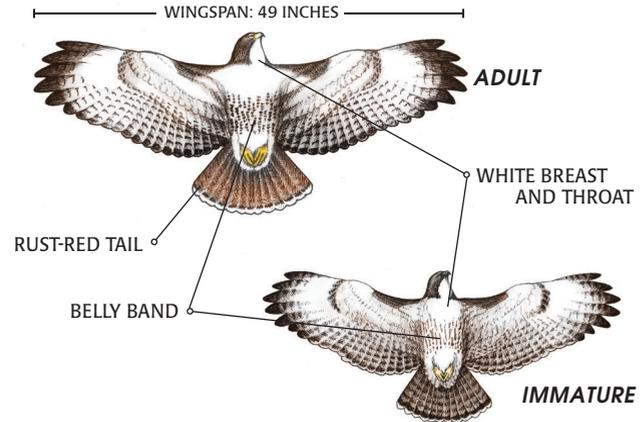
photo by: Phoo Chan ©

RED-TAILED HAWK

Buteo jamaicensis

BUTEOS

An adult red-tailed hawk can be identified by its rust-colored tail feathers, white breast, and dark streaking across a white belly. An immature bird is dull in color and lacks the rust-colored tail, but it does have the white underside and dark streaking on the belly which might appear splotchy. In flight, this large buteo has broad, rounded wings and a short, wide tail. The tail is only cinnamon-colored on top; the underside is pale. The typical red-tailed hawk nest is situated in the fork of a large tree with a commanding view of the surrounding land. Nests might also end up on a cliff ledge or on artificial structures such as a window ledge or billboard platform. It often uses the same nest year after year, although some use alternating nest sites. Some redtails are year-round Ohio residents; others from farther north migrate into the state for the winter. Other birds might even spend the colder months in the southern U.S. The red-tailed hawk is the most common hawk in Ohio and the eastern U.S. Look for one hunting mice and other small mammals along the highway.



HABITAT

Agricultural areas containing scattered woodlots, wooded fencerows, and isolated tall trees are preferred. The species commonly inhabits suburban and urban areas, as well as heavily forested areas where highways and utility line rights-of-way provide clearings for it to hunt.

FOOD SOURCE

The diet is variable and consists of mice, other small mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects, and carrion.

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photo by: Tim Daniel ©





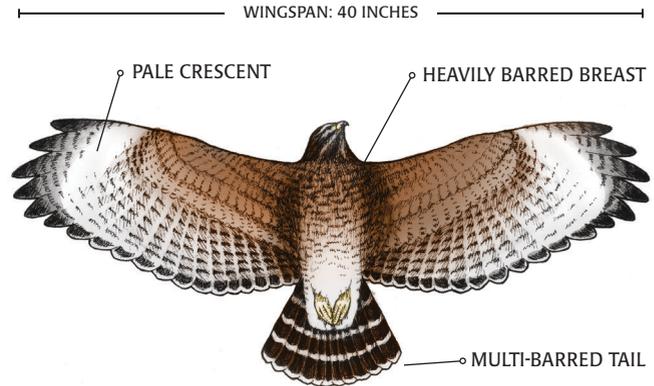
photo by: Hayley Crews ©

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK

Buteo lineatus

BUTEOS

The red-shouldered hawk could easily be considered Ohio's most handsome resident buteo. This striking raptor has a red body, rusty shoulders, and narrow white bands on a dark tail. In flight, translucent crescents near the wingtips help to identify the species at a distance. Noticeably smaller than a red-tailed hawk but larger than a broad-winged hawk, it is a vocal bird that is often heard before seen. Kin or pairs of red-shouldered hawks will often use the same territory for years. When claiming a new territory or protecting an established one, groups of up to four birds may spiral upward to 2,000 feet above nest sites, then descend in dives and sideslips. The hawk often reuses nests from past years. It prefers tall, broad-leaved trees. A nest tree is often near water, and can be located in residential areas. Most red-shouldered hawks are permanent Ohio residents, but some do overwinter in the southern U.S.



HABITAT

This hawk occupies mature lowland woods such as swamps and river corridors. It is tolerant of human activity and therefore will nest in close proximity to humans.

FOOD SOURCE

The diet consists of amphibians, reptiles, and birds in the summer, and birds and mammals in the winter.

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photo by: Nina Harfmann ©





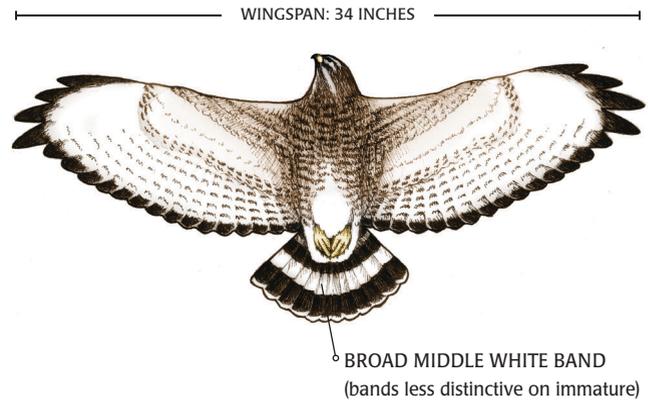
photo by: Chris Hill ©

BROAD-WINGED HAWK

Buteo platypterus

BUTEOS

The broad-winged hawk is the smallest of the buteos and can be compared to the size of an American crow. In addition to its small size and chunky stature, it can be identified by a broad white band on the tail. An adult has a reddish-brown head and barred underparts, with pale undersides of the wings. An immature is lighter brown with coarse streaking on the underparts, particularly on the sides of the breast, and has a narrowly-banded tail. The female builds a new nest each year made from sticks, twigs, and dead leaves. The nest is lined with inner bark strips, lichen, evergreen sprigs, and green leaves. This hawk tends to nest in large deciduous trees, but will also nest near the trunk of a conifer. The male hunts and brings food back to the nesting female and chicks. The species migrates in huge flocks called kettles, which can number into the thousands in prime locales. Ohio kettles tend to be smaller, with dozens to hundreds of birds. In Ohio, migration peaks in late April to May, and again in September. The birds overwinter in the tropics, from Mexico to Brazil.



HABITAT

Found primarily in southeastern Ohio within large areas of mature wooded habitat, a broad-winged hawk spends a good deal of time hiding within the tree canopy.

FOOD SOURCE

Birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects are frequently snatched up by an individual hunting from a perch.

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photo by: Chris Hill ©





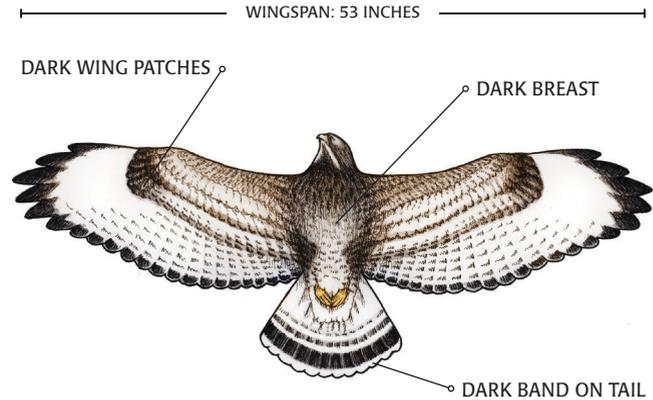
photo by: Tim Zurowski ©

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK

Buteo lagopus

BUTEOS

The largest of the buteos in Ohio, the rough-legged hawk can be spotted during the winter hovering over preferred habitat in search of prey, often hunting at dusk. It soars with its wings raised in a slight dihedral, or V-shape. When resting, it often perches on fence posts and utility poles, and sometimes on slender branches at the top of a tree. The species has two color variations (morphs): light and dark. A light morph rough-legged hawk can be identified by its light-colored tail with a broad, dark band at the tip, and by a distinctive black patch near the bend of the light underwing. A dark morph bird appears almost entirely black when perched. In flight, light underwings are visible. Light morph birds typically outnumber dark ones. The species does not breed in Ohio and is a true northern species, common in the tundra near the Arctic Circle. It overwinters in Ohio and other northern states, as well as southern Canada. This hawk's species name, *lagopus*, comes from the Latin word meaning hare's foot, because its feathered legs and feet resemble a rabbit's furry foot.



HABITAT

Find this winter visitor hunting farm fields, reclaimed surface mines, and marshes. The rough-legged hawk is often spotted suspended in mid-air, hovering over a hunting spot searching for prey.

FOOD SOURCE

Voles and other small mammals are preferred, but this remarkable predator occasionally enjoys dining on other birds.

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photo by: Collins93 ©

NORTHERN HARRIER

Circus hudsonius

CIRCUS

This slender, long-tailed species is the only North American member of a group of hawks known as harriers. A northern harrier is relatively easy to identify in the field because of its low-cruising hunting technique, large size, and wings that form a shallow V-shape similar to the turkey vulture. Interestingly, it has a curved ruff of feathers around its face, similar to an owl. This focuses sound toward its ears, allowing it to use a strong sense of hearing while hunting. The adult male harrier is pale gray in color, while the female and immature birds are mostly brown. Both sexes display a white rump patch. This state-endangered species is a rare breeder in Ohio, sometimes nesting in large grasslands. Either the male or the female chooses the nest site, which is on the ground and usually in a dense clump of vegetation such as willows, grasses, sedges, reeds, bulrushes, or cattails. Certain individuals winter as far south as the Bahamas and Cuba, while others stay in Ohio and can be frequently seen cruising over large grasslands in search of prey. The species was formerly called a marsh hawk.

HABITAT

Find a harrier actively hunting open fields, cropland, prairies, wet meadows, and marshes. It hunts by cruising close to the ground in search of prey.

FOOD SOURCE

Small mammals (especially voles) are common prey items, but a harrier also pursues songbirds, snakes, frogs, and insects (especially grasshoppers). Carrion is also known to be on a northern harrier's menu.

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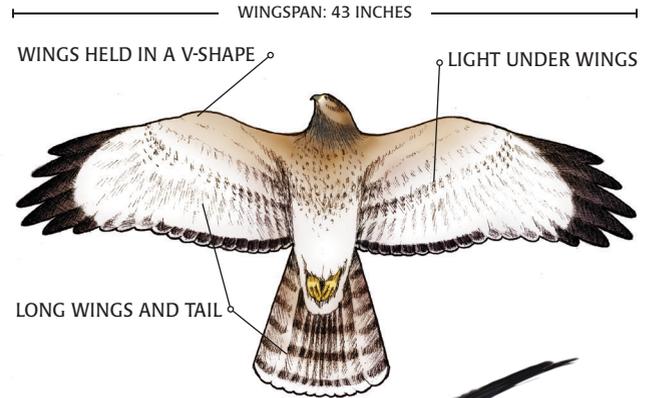




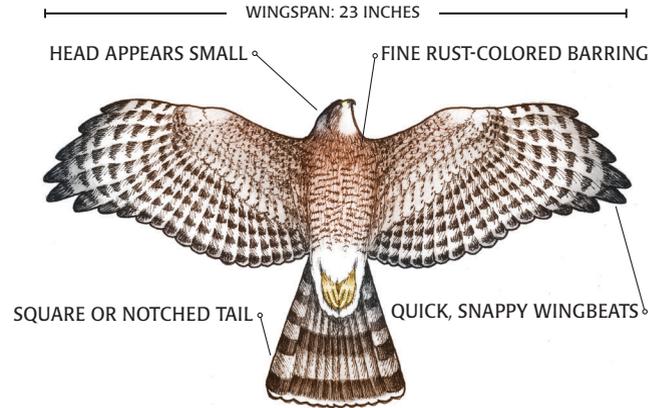
photo by: Paul Reeves Photography ©

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

Accipiter striatus

ACCIPITERS

The sharp-shinned hawk is the smallest hawk in North America. A male sharp-shinned hawk is not much larger than a blue jay, standing about 10 inches tall with a wingspan of 21 inches. A female is much larger, sometimes weighing as much as three times more. An adult is slate gray above and pale below, with fine rust-colored barring on its front, and black bands on the tail. An immature bird shows vertical striping on its underside, with a brownish back. The underside of the wings also exhibit stripes, and the tip of the tail is square. It builds a stick nest near the trunk of a tree, often nesting in dense conifers and sometimes using an abandoned squirrel or crow nest. Sharpies can be seen during spring and fall migrations throughout Ohio, with most nesting activity occurring in the forests of southern and eastern regions. The birds are less common in Ohio than the similar-looking Cooper's hawk. Some winter in Ohio, but most travel to the southeastern states. It is listed as a species of concern in Ohio.



HABITAT

This tiny hawk is seen mostly in forested habitats, but occasionally one can be spotted hunting agricultural fields and suburban areas. It is known to visit backyard bird feeders, not for the seed but to hunt songbirds.

FOOD SOURCE

A sharpie is an impressive hunter, capable of moving quickly through dense woods and snatching a small songbird right off its perch.

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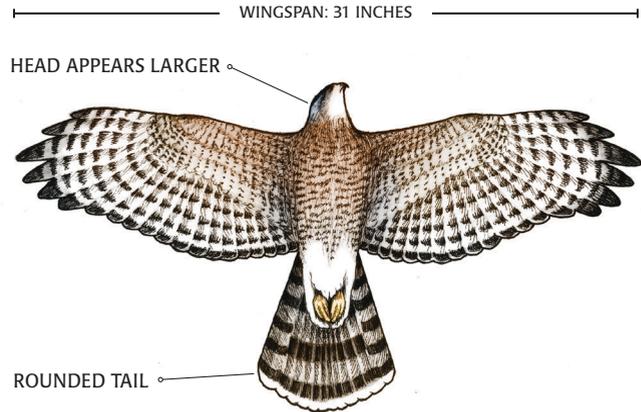
photo by: Sam Carrera ©

COOPER'S HAWK

Accipiter cooperii

ACCIPITERS

This crow-sized avian predator is similar in appearance to a sharp-shinned hawk, but is slightly larger, measuring about 18 inches long with a wingspan of 31 inches. When you see a Cooper's hawk perched with its wings folded, focus on where the wingtips fall in relation to the tip of the tail. A Cooper's hawk has shorter wings and a long tail, so the wingtips fall several inches shorter than the tip of the tail. A peregrine falcon (often mistakenly identified as a Cooper's hawk), on the other hand, has long wings. Furthermore, when in flight, the head of Cooper's hawk appears larger in comparison to the body than the petite head of a sharp-shinned hawk. A female Cooper's hawk has a reputation for a fierce defense of its nest. It will readily attack a human if the bird perceives a threat. Preferred nest sites include woods with dense undergrowth and pine plantations. This is a common winter resident that is observed statewide. Migrant birds tend to come north slightly ahead of the smaller sharp-shinned hawk.



HABITAT

Even more so than the sharp-shinned hawk, the Cooper's hawk commonly raids backyard bird feeding stations. Otherwise, it can be spotted amongst deciduous forests or open woodland habitats with occasional open meadows and clearings.

FOOD SOURCE

The predator mainly enjoys a diet of medium-sized birds such as doves, pigeons, robins, and jays, although small mammals, reptiles, and amphibians can be included in the diet as well.

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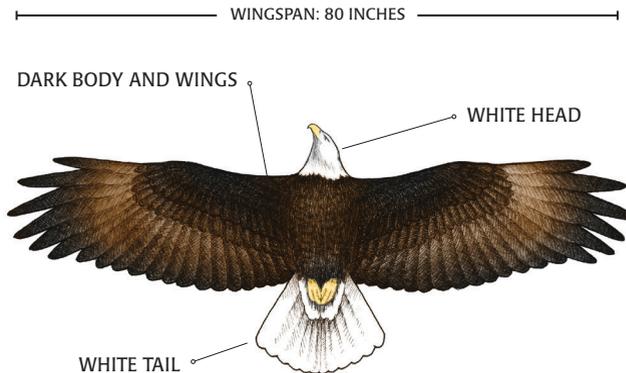
photo by: cvrestan ©

BALD EAGLE

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

EAGLES

The bald eagle is the second-largest bird of prey in all of North America, only smaller than the California condor. An adult bald eagle has a snow white head and tail, brownish-black body, long, heavily-hooked yellow beak, and a wingspan that can exceed 7 feet. The head, tail, and body of an immature eagle is brownish, but while in flight it shows the white underplumage of the interior of the wings. It takes up to five years for an immature eagle to attain full adult plumage. The male and female form a long-term pair bond, but a mate might be quickly replaced if one of the pair perishes. The pair builds a massive nest, some of the largest of all bird species, usually in the fork of a tall tree. Both sexes bring materials to the nest, but the female does most of the placement. They weave together sticks and fill in the cracks with softer material such as grass, moss, or cornstalks. A nest can take up to three months to build, and may be reused (and added to) year after year. The Lake Erie region harbors the most significant populations of bald eagles in Ohio, although our national bird can be found statewide.



HABITAT

Often spotted near sizable bodies of water. Adults tend to be year-round residents while immature birds often wander widely.

FOOD SOURCE

Fish, waterfowl, medium-sized mammals, and carrion are readily enjoyed by eagles. This powerful predator hunts fish by gracefully skimming the surface of the water, plucking the fish from just below the surface with sharp talons. Different from the osprey, an eagle typically carries its fish sideways (rather than headfirst).

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photo by: Mel Kowasic ©





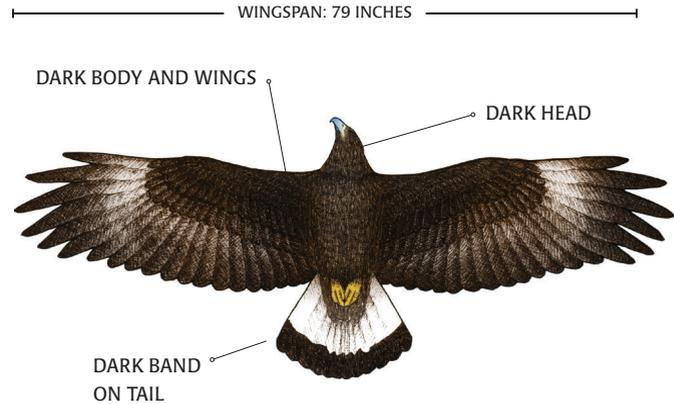
photo by: Dennis Jacobsen ©

GOLDEN EAGLE

Aquila chrysaetos

EAGLES

The golden eagle is one of the largest birds in North America. Its wings are broad and similar to a red-tailed hawk's, but longer relative to the body. At a distance, the head appears quite small and the tail is long. An adult golden eagle is dark brown with glistening golden feathers on the back of the head and neck. For the first several years of its life, a young bird has a neatly defined white patch at the base of the tail and in the wings. Usually found alone or in pairs, the golden eagle typically soars or glides on its long wings with wingtip feathers spread like fingers. There are no records of the species nesting in Ohio. In other states, it usually nests on cliffs. Nesting sites in trees, on the ground, or in human-made structures have been documented, too. Found mostly in the western half of the U.S., the golden eagle is rare in eastern states. In Ohio, sightings are common along the Lake Erie shoreline on the coldest of days, and during spring and fall migration.



HABITAT

This large hunter tends to avoid developed areas while preferring agricultural fields, uninterrupted stretches of forest, grasslands, and shrub-land. Reclaimed land from mining operations in southeast Ohio is favored as well.

FOOD SOURCE

Typical foods include medium-sized mammals, birds, and occasionally carrion. The golden eagle is, however, capable of taking larger bird and mammal prey such as swans, opossums, and raccoons.

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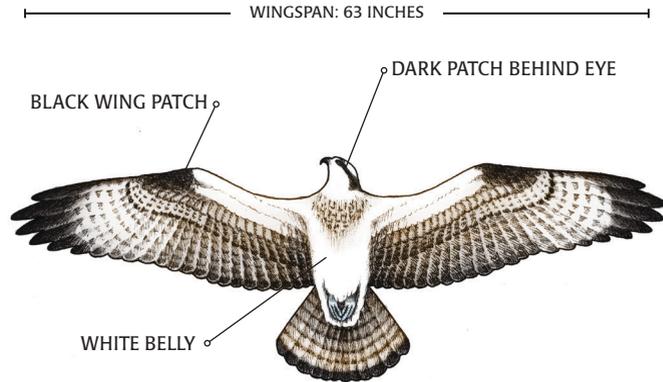
Photo by LM Images

OSPREY

Pandion haliaetus

OSPREY

An osprey can be identified by both its habitat and the way it looks. Because it is a fish eater, the osprey is usually seen near water. It is colored dark brown above and white below, with a dark patch near a distinctive bend midway on its wings. It also has a distinctive dark patch behind the eyes. The osprey stands about 25 inches tall with a wingspan of 63 inches, and typically weighs only about 3 pounds. A pair of birds builds a large nest near a water body, often using the same nest year after year. Ospreys also use artificial nesting platforms. Interestingly, the female is fed by the male from the time the pair forms a bond until after she lays her eggs. An osprey hunts by hovering 30 to 100 feet above the water. When a fish is spotted, it folds in its wings and plunges feet-first in order to grasp the target with strong talons. The soles of an osprey's feet are unique, with spiny projections that give the talons extra grip on slippery prey. The birds travel as far as South America to overwinter.



HABITAT

Individuals are regularly sighted in Ohio while flying over open bodies of water searching for fish, the primary food.

FOOD SOURCE

The osprey is the only hawk on the continent that eats almost exclusively live fish. On rare occasions, birds have been observed feeding on fish carcasses or on birds, snakes, small mammals, and even salamanders.

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photo by: Tim Daniel ©

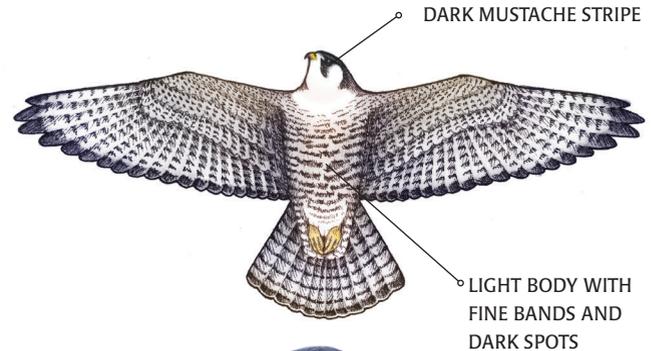
PEREGRINE FALCON

Falco peregrinus

FALCONS

The name peregrine comes from a Latin word that means wanderer. That's fitting, because this falcon has the greatest worldwide range of any other bird species. A distinguishing feature of the peregrine falcon is the black stripe that looks similar to a mustache below the eyes. Adults are slate gray above and light underneath with fine black bands. The head and neck are blackish with a dark wedge of coloration, known as a mustache, extending below the eyes that forms a hooded appearance. The throat, chin, and ear patch are contrasted by white feathers. An immature falcon is more brown on the back and has lengthwise stripes on the underparts. This bird makes a simple nest called a scrape nest. In Ohio, choice nesting locations are skyscrapers, bell towers, power plants, and bridges. Typically in western states, the peregrine nests on cliffs. The peregrine can be spotted in Ohio statewide, most likely in larger cities. An adult bird sometimes chooses to overwinter in large cities, while young birds often migrate south to warmer climates.

WINGSPAN: 41 INCHES



HABITAT

Skyscrapers, water towers, cliffs, power pylons, and other tall structures attract the peregrine. If a mudflat full of shorebirds and ducks suddenly erupts from the ground, scan the skies for this fast-moving hunter.

FOOD SOURCE

After a pair of peregrines forms a bond, they hunt cooperatively. The female dives first and eats first, and she tends to take larger prey than the male. Prey items are mostly shorebirds, waterfowl, and songbirds. Bats are in the diet for some individuals.

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photo by: Chris Hill ©



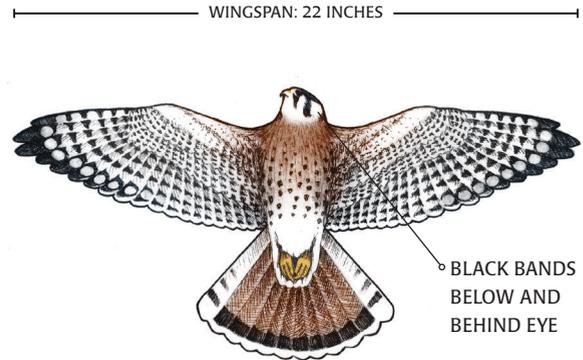


AMERICAN KESTREL

Falco sparverius

FALCONS

The American kestrel is North America's smallest falcon, measuring not much bigger than a blue jay. It is generally 9 inches long with a 22-inch wingspan (males and females are close in size). Despite its small stature, this is a feisty bird boasting a charismatic attitude that matches its flashy exterior. Both sexes have a rusty-colored back and tail accompanied by thick, black vertical bands on the sides of the head. The male's slate-blue head and wings contrast with the rusty-red back and tail. The female has the same warm reddish tone on her wings, back, and tail. The kestrel is a high-energy bird, appearing restless when perched, bobbing its head or tail up and down, or vocalizing for no apparent reason. This adept predator is well-known for its hover-hunting capabilities, of which it does more skillfully than many other raptors. While hovering, it scans the landscape for a target while remaining in the same precise airspace, for uninterrupted focus. The kestrel is the only cavity-nesting diurnal raptor in Ohio. Where natural tree cavities are not available, a kestrel will raise its young in an artificial structure. Many kestrels overwinter in Ohio while others travel farther south.



HABITAT

The American kestrel prefers open areas along roadways and ditches, including grasslands, meadows, pastures, woodland openings, suburbs, city parks, and farmland.

FOOD SOURCE

Small mammals, reptiles, and insects are all on a kestrel's diet. It may store or cache food for later consumption in grass clumps, tree stumps, holes, fence posts, bushes, or on top of utility poles.

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photo by: Tim Daniel ©





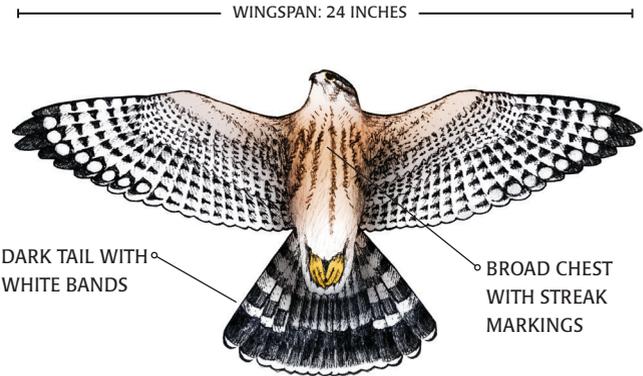
photo by: FotoRequest ©

MERLIN

Falco columbarius

FALCONS

A merlin might be small, but it is a fierce falcon well designed for blind-siding prey. It is a robust hunter that can be identified by its rapid wingbeats and overall dark tones. This small but powerful predator is broader and stockier than the slightly smaller American kestrel. Pointed wings, a broad chest, and a medium-length tail punctuate the identification of this species. An adult male is slate gray to dark gray, while the female and immature birds are more brown. The chest is usually heavily streaked and the underwings are dark. The dark tail has narrow white bands, and the face often lacks a prominent malar, or mustache, stripe. A merlin does not build its own nest. Instead, the pair will reuse old crow, raven, or hawk nests and they rarely reuse a nest in subsequent years. A few recent nesting records have been documented in Ohio. Although increasing, this wizard on the wing is still considered to be a relatively rare migrant and winter resident in the Buckeye State. The merlin used to be called a pigeon hawk because it looks somewhat pigeon-like in flight. The species name, columbarius, is also a reference to pigeons.



HABITAT

Be on the lookout for a merlin hunting grasslands, forested openings, river systems, and even suburban and urban areas.

FOOD SOURCE

This bird eats mostly small songbirds, but will also consume shorebirds, bats, and even insects on the wing.

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photo by: Neil Burton ©



RARE *Elanoides forficatus*
SWALLOW-TAILED KITE

This is a large but slender and buoyant raptor with bold black and white plumage. Flying insects make up most of a swallowtail's diet, but small invertebrates including frogs, nestling birds, and snakes are also possible. Widespread in the American tropics, this bird is a spring and summer visitor to the southeastern U.S., especially Florida. It's a rare vagrant north to Ohio during the warmer months.

RARE *Ictinia mississippiensis*
MISSISSIPPI KITE

A Mississippi kite is a slender, fairly small raptor with long, pointy wings. A long, square-tipped tail pairs with a small, delicate, hooked beak. The bird feeds mostly on medium to large insects, frogs, toads, snakes, and small mammals. This species is mostly a southern bird and a rare but increasing vagrant here. Mississippi kite nests are extremely rare in Ohio. Kites are fiercely protective of nest sites against intruders, but are also social birds that often roost and hunt in groups.

photo by: Mark Smith nsb ©



photo by: Brent Barnes ©



Parabuteo unicinctus
RARE HARRIS'S HAWK

This bird is found mostly in desert habitat in the southwest U.S. The species is unique in its social nature. The most social species of hawk in North America, the birds can often be seen hunting medium-sized mammals and birds in groups or teams. The hawk is easily recognized by its chestnut red color, white rump, and yellow beak and feet. You might see a Harris's hawk used by a falconer or in an education program.



Buteo swainsoni
RARE SWAINSON'S HAWK

Ohio has about 10 records of the Swainson's hawk, a bird of the western plains. Although it prefers grasslands, it will also hunt in crop fields and can be seen soaring with wings in a shallow V while hunting for small mammals. It is also known for running along the ground, chasing after insects and other prey. The Swainson's hawk has one of the longest distance migration paths of any raptor in North America, traveling to Argentina each fall.



ACCIPITER GENTILIS

RARE **NORTHERN GOSHAWK**

The northern goshawk is a fierce predator, similar in size to a red-tailed hawk, and capable of taking prey as large as a fox squirrel. It is a rare migrant and winter resident in Ohio. The goshawk prefers forest and grassland habitats where it hunts birds, mammals, reptiles and invertebrates. The bird is slate blue-gray on its back and head, and pale gray with fine barring on the underparts. It is a larger cousin of the more common Cooper's hawk and sharp-shinned hawk.



FALCO RUSTICOLUS

RARE **GYRFALCON**

The gyrfalcon is the largest falcon species in the world. This bird is an extremely rare visitor to Ohio, but a few have been spotted hunting gulls near Lake Erie in the winter. It will readily take waterfowl and other large birds. The species has three color morphs: white, dark, and gray. It prefers to hunt over open ground, similar to its main habitat on the Arctic tundra. The species is highly prized by falconers around the world.



RARE **Falco mexicanus**
PRAIRIE FALCON

Ohio has about six records of the prairie falcon. This species typically hunts mammals, small birds, and insects on the plains of western states. Predominantly brown in color, it has a characteristic white stripe above the eye and brown mustache stripe below. From below, it shows dark feathers that stretch from the base of the wing to the wrist. The prairie falcon is similar in size and appearance to a peregrine falcon.



RARE **Caracara cheriway**
CRESTED CARACARA

This bird is usually found in the southern U.S. and Mexico. This unusual member of the falcon family behaves more like a vulture. It prefers open country and is often spotted on the ground feeding on carrion. The crested caracara sports a black crested cap, white neck, black back and wings, and long, thin legs with black feathers only down to the knee joint. It has a bright red face, yellow lower legs and feet, and a blue-gray bill. It is extremely rare in Ohio.



OHIO BIRDING GROUPS & ORGANIZATIONS

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND

PO Box 391037 • Solon, OH 44139

☎ **216-556-5441**

website: clevelandaudubon.org

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF OHIO

3398 West Galbraith Rd. • Cincinnati, OH 45239

☎ **513-741-7926**

website: home.earthlink.net/~audsociohio

AUDUBON SOCIETY/MAHONING VALLEY

P.O. Box 3214 • Youngstown, OH 44512

email: lhwo69@gmail.com

Facebook: *Audubon Society/Mahoning Valley*

AUDUBON MIAMI VALLEY

P.O. Box 556 • Oxford, OH 45056

website: amvohio.org

BLACKBROOK AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 1306 • Mentor, OH 44061

☎ **440-255-0961**

website: blackbrookaudubon.org

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

PO Box 33 • Elyria, OH 44035

☎ **440-365-6465**

website: blackriveraudubon.org

BLACK SWAMP AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 7086 • Defiance, OH 43512

BLACK SWAMP BIRD OBSERVATORY

13551 W. State Route 2 • Oak Harbor, OH 43449

☎ **419-898-4070**

website: bsbobird.org

CANTON AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 9586 • Canton, OH 44711

website: cantonaudubon.org

email: cantonaudubonsociety@gmail.com

CINCINNATI BIRD CLUB

☎ **513-741-7926**

website: cincinnatiudubon.org

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505 W Whittier St • Columbus, OH

☎ **614-545-5475 ext 307**

website: columbusaudubon.org

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1375 East Siebenthaler Ave • Dayton, OH 45414

☎ **937-654-3301**

website: daytonaudubon.org

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email: ecoaudubon@gmail.com

Facebook: *eastcentralohioaudubon*

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website: firelandsaudubon.com

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P.O. Box 1473 • Akron, OH 44309

☎ **330-645-0953**

website: akronaudubon.org

GREATER MOHICAN AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 907 • Ashland, OH 44805

website: gmasohio.org

KELLEYS ISLAND AUDUBON CLUB

P.O. Box 42 • Kelleys Island, OH 43438

website: kelleysislandnature.com

KIRTLAND BIRD CLUB

website: kirtlandbirdclub.org

OHIO BIRD CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

website: obcnet.org

OHIO BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

PMB 111 • 343 West Milltown Rd. • Wooster, OH 44691

website: ohiobluebirdsociety.org

OHIO ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 2432 • Westerville, OH 43086

website: ohiobirds.org

PRESIDENT R. B. HAYES AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 92 • Fremont, OH 43420

SHAWNEE NATURE CLUB

PO Box 766 • Portsmouth, OH 45662

email: shawneenatureclub@gmail.com

website: sites.google.com/site/shawneenatureclub

TOLEDO NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION

website: toledonaturalist.org

TRI-MORAINÉ AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 5648 • Lima, OH 45802

website: tri-moraineaudubon.org

WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

4310 Bush Avenue • Cleveland, OH 44109

website: wcasohio.org

DID YOU KNOW?

- Unlike a human, a bird can see ultraviolet light. This enables a raptor to hunt more proficiently. For example, an American kestrel can make out a urine trail that a vole, a common prey mammal, leaves behind as it runs along the ground.
- The black vulture lacks a voice box, so its vocal abilities are limited to raspy hisses and grunts.
- Vultures are nature's cleanup crew, consuming carrion which results in a cleaner environment. A vulture's head appears naked. The lack of head feathers is an adaptation that allows it to eat carrion without soiling its feathers, which could create disease problems.
- A vulture has an excellent immune system, feasting on rotting carcasses without contracting botulism, anthrax, cholera, or salmonella.
- A bald eagle will pirate freshly killed fish away from ospreys and dead fish from crows.
- Because its common prey animals seldom ingest pesticides, the golden eagle escaped the population declines suffered by fish-eating or bird-eating raptors.
- The osprey is one of the most widely distributed species in the world. It nests in Europe, Asia, North Africa, the East Indies, Australia, and North America. It is unusual among hawks in that it possesses a reversible outer toe. This means it can grasp with two toes in front and two behind.
- Historically, there were no records of a nesting pair of peregrine falcons in Ohio. After a pair began nesting in Toledo in 1988, the ODNR Division of Wildlife conducted an introduction program to help restore the eastern population of the species. The population had declined because of pesticide poisoning in the middle 20th century.
- The peregrine falcon is admired for its spectacular flying ability, the speed it attains in pursuit of prey, and its ability to adapt to urban settings. One of its hunting techniques includes climbing high above flying birds, then plunging after them at speeds of 100 to 200 miles per hour! As the falcon hits its prey, it produces a shower of feathers as the talons drive into the bird.
- The common species name merlin comes from esmerillon, the old French name for the species.



GLOSSARY

AERODYNAMIC: Having a shape that reduces the drag from air moving past

BINOCULAR VISION: Using two eyes with an overlapping field of view, creating good depth perception

CARNIVORE: An animal that feeds on another animal

CARRION: The decaying flesh of dead animals

CIRCUS: A worldwide genus of birds of prey that includes the northern harrier; harriers are common in Europe, Asia, and Africa

DIHEDRAL: The upward angle of a bird's wings

DIURNAL: Active primarily during daylight hours

HABITAT: An environment where a plant or animal normally can be found, it includes adequate access to food, water, shelter, and space

IMMATURE: A bird that has not yet reached the breeding stage, and generally has different coloration than the adult of the same species

MONOGAMOUS: The breeding pattern of birds and other animals where a pair remains together from year to year

PESTICIDE: A substance used to kill or control unwanted plants or animals

PLUMAGE: A bird's feathers

POLYGAMOUS: The breeding pattern of birds and other animals where one individual mates with multiple partners during a breeding season

RAPTOR: A bird of prey, such as an eagle, hawk, falcon, or owl, that grabs or seizes

SCAVENGER: An animal that feeds on dead plants or animals found in its environment

SEXUALLY DIMORPHIC: The differences in appearance between the male and female of the same species, such as color, shape, size, and structure

TALONS: the claws of a bird of prey

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Julie Davis



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For more information about Ohio's native wildlife, please contact the ODNR Division of Wildlife:

1-800-WILDLIFE

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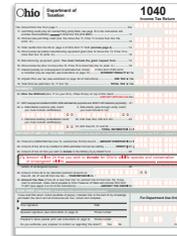
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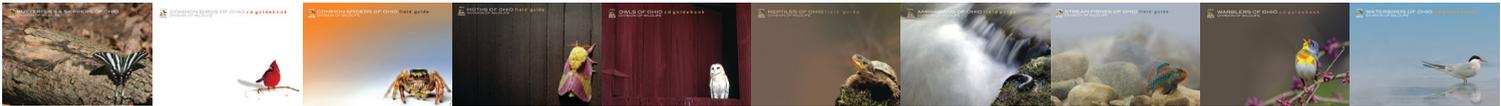
To purchase a Legacy Stamp, call the ODNR Division of Wildlife at 1-800-WILDLIFE or visit the web at wildohio.gov.



To make a donation, go to the second page of the 1040 income tax form for the tax checkoff program.



To purchase a license plate, visit your local registrar's office or call the BMV at 1-844-644-6268.



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- Pub 5140 - Common Spiders of Ohio
- Pub 5204 - Butterflies & Skippers of Ohio
- Pub 5320 - Dragonflies & Damselflies of Ohio

- Pub 5334 - Sportfish of Ohio
- Pub 5344 - Mammals of Ohio
- Pub 5348 - Amphibians of Ohio
- Pub 5349 - Warblers of Ohio

- Pub 5354 - Reptiles of Ohio
- Pub 5386 - Raptors of Ohio
- Pub 5414 - Common Birds of Ohio
- Pub 5418 - Waterbirds of Ohio

- Pub 5423 - Owls of Ohio
- Pub 5467 - Moths of Ohio
- Pub 5473 - Common Lichens of Ohio
- Pub 5488 - Common Bees & Wasps of Ohio
- Pub 5494 - Spring Wildflowers of Ohio



DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES



MISSION STATEMENT

To conserve and improve fish and wildlife resources and their habitats for sustainable use and appreciation by all.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing Ohio's fish and wildlife resources. The primary source of funding for the division comes from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, federal excise taxes on hunting, fishing, and shooting equipment, and donations from the public. We care about all wildlife and maintaining stable, healthy wildlife populations. Our challenge is to balance the needs of wildlife, habitat, and people.

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