

Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey



National Conservation Area

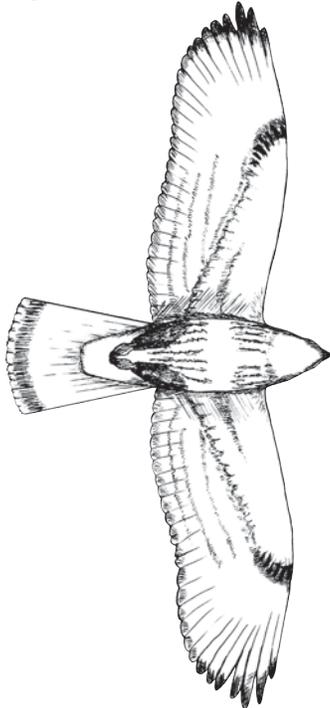
Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*)

Description/Size

Wing span: 48-60 inches

Length: 21-27 inches

Weight: 2.2-4.5 pounds



Habitat/Range



Food/Diet

On average, this is the largest buteo in North America. It has a broad head and distinctively tapered and narrow-tipped wings. Iris is chestnut brown. Bill is dark bluish to pearl gray. Cere, feet and toes are yellow. Sexes are similar in plumage, but females are noticeably larger and tend to show more pigmentation on legs and belly. There are two morphs or color phases with the dark morph being less frequent. The light morph adult has a white or gray tail and nearly white underparts, with sparse rufous or gray specks on the belly and the characteristic rufous "V" formed by the dark legs and tarsi held under the rump in flight. Underwings are faintly speckled. The head is whiter than that of most hawks, with back and shoulders rufous and a noticeable white area in widely extended primaries as seen from above. Light morphs exhibit varying amounts of largely ferruginous and some light neutral gray in a band across belly and on underside of wings. The adult dark morph is dark-headed with dark upperparts and an all dark belly and underparts. The under parts of the wing are two-toned with the dark coverts contrasting with the pale primaries and secondary feathers. Adult dark morphs have a distinctive plain light-colored tail and light area on upper and lower surfaces of primaries. Dark tarsi cannot be distinguished. Upper wing and back feathers rufous fringed. Adult dark morphs exhibit varying amounts of reddish brown pigments in ventral body feathers. No subspecies are recognized, but two separated subpopulations occur on either side of the Rocky Mts.

Similar Species

Red-tailed hawk – some races have similar wing and tail patterns.

Golden eagle – larger and differs in plumage; similar in behavior.

Arid to semi-arid regions, shrub steppe, grasslands and agricultural areas in southwestern Canada, western US and northern Mexico. Prefers open, flat and rolling terrain largely devoid of trees save for small groves, riparian corridors, and shelterbelts. Avoids high elevations, forest interiors, narrow canyons, cliff areas and habitats recently altered by agriculture.

Small to medium sized mammals such as jackrabbits, prairie dogs and ground squirrels. Will sometimes hunt birds, reptiles, and insects. Diet varies depending on distribution of prey species. In the NCA, the black-tailed jackrabbit is a major food species along with ground squirrels.

Raptor Information Sheet - Ferruginous Hawk



Voice

Alarm call – “kree-a” and harsh “kaah kaah”. Vocal during the breeding season. Remarkably quiet in winter even when small groups gather around kills.

Behavior

Flight and hunting behavior is suggestive of a golden eagle. Slow wing beats. Sluggish when taking flight. Soars and circles with uptilted wings. Glides with wings held flat or slightly uptilted. Hunts from a perch; walks, hops, and runs on ground after prey; cruises low over the ground; or kites (in strong winds stays in place aloft without flapping). Hunting may occur at any time of day; early morning and late afternoon may be common. Victims are seized by the feet and a series of blows may be given, including driving the rear talon into the body to puncture a vital organ. Before bringing prey to the nest, the adults will often eat the head. Food caching has been noted but not near the nest. May gather in small groups around abundant food source. When feeding communally on prey in winter, makes short, hopping displays with wings outstretched to flush other birds from prey. Generally aggressive during breeding season. Harasses, but more often is harassed by, other buteos. Northern populations are completely migratory. Almost nothing is known about migration of southern populations; they appear to migrate short distances or to be sedentary.

Reproduction/Nesting

Clutch size: 2-4eggs
Eggs: sub-elliptical, 2.5 x 2 inches, whitish irregularly spotted or blotched with reddish-brown.
Incubation: 32-33 days
Fledge: 38-50 days
Disperse: 4 weeks

Builds large stick nests. Shows a strong preference for elevated nest sites, but will nest on the ground when these are absent. Uses trees, bushes, cliff ledges, rock/dirt outcrops, power poles, artificial platforms and other man-made structures. Tree nests are typically in isolated trees or isolated clumps of trees in exposed locations. One or more alternate nests are located within the nesting territory. Nesting attempts and fledgling success fluctuates closely with variations in prey abundance. Clutch size can range from 1-8 eggs, depending on prey populations, and if food is scarce, the pair may not nest at all. Sexually mature at 2 years. Apparently monogamous, but 3 adults are sometimes seen at nests; breeding status of such trios unknown. There is no evidence of mate switching. Some pair bonds may be maintained year-round. Birds probably choose mates near breeding sites.

Life Span

Longest recorded – 23 years 8 months. Most die within first 5 years.

Conservation Status

Not on the US Fish and Wildlife's Endangered or Threatened Species List. However it is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Idaho Fish & Game lists the ferruginous hawk as a protected non game species for which it is illegal to collect, harm or otherwise remove from its natural habitat. BLM considers this an imperiled species in Idaho - it is experiencing declines in population or habitat and is in danger of regional or local extinctions in Idaho in the foreseeable future. Threats include habitat loss to agriculture development and urbanization, livestock grazing, reduction in prey populations either through habitat loss or poisoning/controlling small mammals, illegal shooting, and human disturbance. Where road-killed jackrabbits are abundant, sometimes killed by collisions with automobiles. Pesticides, electrocutions, and collisions with power lines do not pose a serious threat to the species. Effects of wildfire in nesting habitat, such as the NCA, has also contribute to population declines.

Viewing in the NCA

The ferruginous hawk is seen in the NCA from April through July.

Interesting Facts

Spanish name:
Aquililla patas asperas

- The scientific name comes from the Latin word *buteo* meaning buzzard, an early name for hawks and vultures, and *regalis* meaning royal or regal and refers to the large size of the bird. Also, was first studied in Real del Monte, Mexico and *Real* is Spanish for royal.
- The common name comes from the Latin word *ferrugo*, meaning the color of rust, and refers to the color of the adults.
- Other names: prairie eagle, gopher hawk, and ferruginous rough-legged hawk.
- Is one of two booted hawks in North America. Like the rough-legged hawk, they have feathers that go down the legs to their toes.

Sources

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Illustration: courtesy Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Map: The Peregrine Fund
Photography: Mark Hilliard, BLM



Ferruginous Hawk
(Buteo regalis)



Adult - Light morph



Adult
Dark morph



Nestlings



Immature

Photos: Geoff Urwin, light adult in flight
Know Your Birds of Prey, Axia CD ROM