

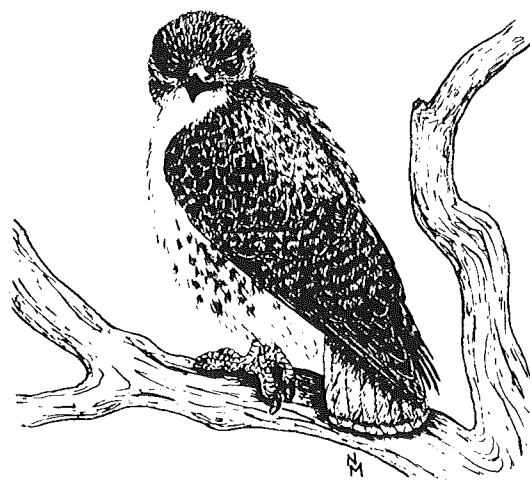
Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

The Red-tailed Hawk occurs throughout North America, exhibiting a broad tolerance to a variety of ecological conditions. Major habitat requirements are open country with scattered forests in which to hunt and tall trees for nest sites and perches. In Vermont, these hawks particularly favor fallow pastures interspersed with open woodlots. Red-tailed Hawks will nest in a wide array of locations that meet their minimum requirements for hunting range and nest sites, including woodlots in suburban neighborhoods (Minor and Minor 1981) and heavily wooded ridges far from any opening (Titus and Mosher 1981). In western Maryland, Titus and Mosher (1981) found that Red-tails tended to nest away from clearings and water, on east-facing slopes near the tops of ridges.

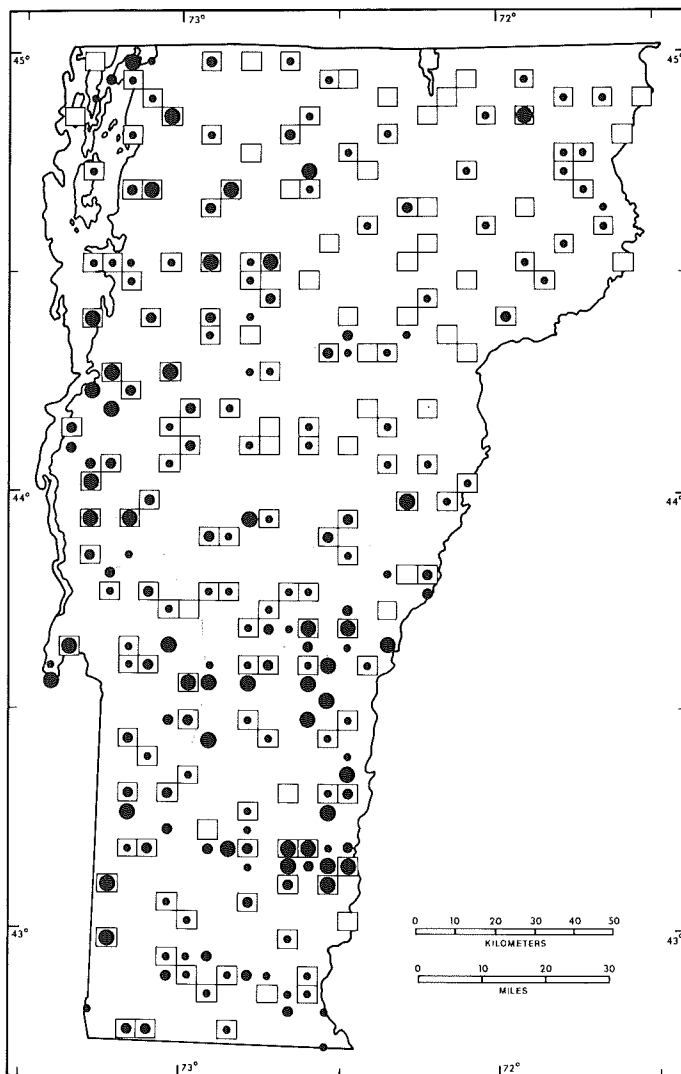
Most observers detect Red-tailed Hawks by careful scanning of the skies. These birds are frequently seen soaring high overhead or in direct flight. The white breast of a perched Red-tail often contrasts sharply with its background. The nest, a large structure of sticks, is conspicuous before trees leaf out in May. Nests of this species are most easily found by surveying woodlots during the winter and early spring. More than 58% of the 43 Atlas Project confirmations were of active nests. Fledglings remain in the vicinity of the nest for at least 3 weeks and often call attention to themselves with their persistent begging. More than 30% of Atlas Project confirmations were of recently fledged young. Fieldwork for raptors could have raised the 16% confirmation rate in priority blocks.

Red-tailed Hawks are seen throughout the year in Vermont. During the winter, Red-tails are much less numerous in eastern Vermont than in the open Champlain Lowlands. Red-tails return to nesting territories in Vermont as early as mid February; most are back by early March. Nests are built or repaired in early March and egg



laying commences late in the month. Nests are built high in the taller available trees on the home range, usually in dominant species such as beech or sugar maple. The average height of 17 Vermont nests was 16.9 m (55.5 ft). The eggs are plain white and number from 1 to 4; the average of 19 Vermont clutches was 2.7 eggs. Egg dates for 23 Vermont clutches range from April 12 to May 23. Calculations from notations on collected clutches place estimated dates for the initiation of clutches from March 20 to April 22 in Vermont. The incubation period, as calculated by Luttich et al. (1971) in Alberta, is 33 days. Estimated hatching dates for Vermont, determined from notes on collected clutches, range from April 25 to May 25. Six dates for nestlings in Vermont range from May 31 to June 20. Young Red-tails fledge at 43 to 48 days (Johnson 1975). There are three dates for fledged young in Vermont, ranging from June 22 to July 5.

The Red-tailed Hawk is the most widespread and well-known buteo in Vermont, and possibly the most common. The species was recorded in 78% of the Atlas Project's 179 priority blocks. The Red-tail is more common in western Vermont, where a large amount of land is in agricultural use, than it is in the more heavily forested eastern regions. According to most accounts, this hawk was less common in New England



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 140 (78%)

Possible breeding: 82 (59% of total)

Probable breeding: 35 (25% of total)

Confirmed breeding: 23 (16% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	28	90	20.0
Green Mountains	43	80	31.0
North Central	8	42	6.0
Northeast Highlands	12	75	8.5
East Central	14	74	10.0
Taconic Mountains	16	100	11.0
Eastern Foothills	19	79	13.5

early in the twentieth century. Forbush (1927) and Fortner et al. (1933) noted that the species had declined and was decreasing, apparently because of shooting. Legal protection, and increased awareness of the value of predators on the part of farmers, has allowed the species to increase and flourish. As long as the Vermont landscape remains diversified, with a mixture of open and closed habitats, this species should remain common.

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