

Hawk identification chart

Six regional examples | Eastern United States, with a Mid-Atlantic focus | Online Field Guide

Compare shape and marking placement. Adult colors are not a key to every juvenile hawk.

1. Red-tailed Hawk

Buteo jamaicensis



Adult: rusty tail; pale body with darker belly band

Red-tailed bird landing

2. Red-shouldered Hawk

Buteo lineatus

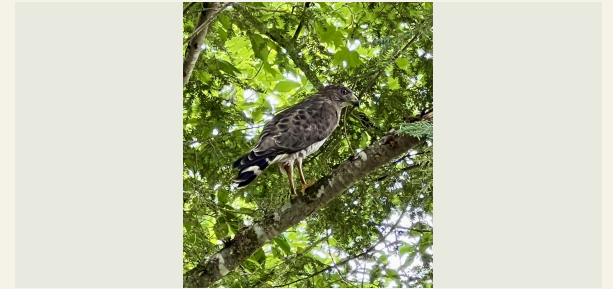


Adult: reddish barred breast and black-white tail

Adult; perched side view

3. Broad-winged Hawk

Buteo platypterus



Adult: broad pale tail band and compact buteo shape

Perched bird; tail bands visible

4. Rough-legged Hawk

Buteo lagopus



Light form: dark wrist patches; pale tail base

Light-morph bird in flight

5. Cooper's Hawk

Astur cooperii



Adult: gray back, barred chest, rounded tail tip

Barred-breast bird; front view

6. Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus



Adult: small head, barred chest, long tail

Adult plumage; front view

1. Ken Sherlock
2. Vicki Miller
3. Ed McNierney
4. Sevin Dee; CC BY 4.0.
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Comparison notes and photo credits

Hawk chart companion | Original layout and wording by Online Field Guide

Hawk	Habitat clue	Identification level	Seasonal occurrence
Red-tailed Hawk	Open fields, roadsides and woodland edges	Species candidate	Year-round
Red-shouldered Hawk	Mature woods, often near streams or wetlands	Species candidate	Year-round
Broad-winged Hawk	Deciduous woods and wooded landscapes	Species candidate	Spring through fall; migrates south
Rough-legged Hawk	Open winter fields, grassland and marsh edges	Species candidate	Late fall through winter; irregular locally
Cooper's Hawk	Woodlands, wooded suburbs and parks	Species candidate	Year-round
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Wooded areas and migration corridors	Species candidate	Mainly migration and winter in much of Mid-Atlantic

Regional occurrence includes migrants and winter visitors. A hawk outside its usual season still needs a full identification; the calendar alone does not settle it.

Photo credits and original file links

- 1. Red-tailed Hawk:** *Buteo jamaicensis* - iNaturalist photo 3663761, by Ken Sherlock.
- 2. Red-shouldered Hawk:** *Buteo lineatus* - iNaturalist photo 358621354, by Vicki Miller.
- 3. Broad-winged Hawk:** *Buteo platypterus* - iNaturalist photo 401134985, by Ed McNierney.
- 4. Rough-legged Hawk:** *Buteo lagopus* - iNaturalist photo 107248791, by Sevin Dee. CC BY 4.0.
- 5. Cooper's Hawk:** *Astur cooperii* - iNaturalist photo 52268108, by Shirley Zundell. CC BY 4.0.
- 6. Sharp-shinned Hawk:** *Accipiter striatus* - iNaturalist photo 112860673, by Troy B. CC BY 4.0.

Identification references: Red-tailed Hawk; Red-shouldered Hawk; Broad-winged Hawk; Rough-legged Hawk; Cooper's Hawk; Sharp-shinned Hawk.

This chart compares regional examples; it is not a complete species key.