



Wildlife Window: The Red-shoulder Hawk & American Kestrel Powerful and Beautiful Birds of Prey.

By the Rivendell Ponds & Preserves Committee

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We are so fortunate that Hawks and Kestrels are frequent visitors to Rivendell. Although both birds are considered “Raptors,” **Red-shoulder Hawks** are members of the “Buteo” family, however, Kestrels are “Falcons.” Buteos are medium or large raptors with long, wide, rounded wings and relatively short fan-shaped tails. Hawks are high-soaring birds that like to perch on lonely snags. They are most often seen in open areas or forested habitats.

As the smallest member of the Falcon family, the **American Kestrels** have long, pointed wings; long tails and squarer heads than other birds of prey. They are quick and agile flyers that are usually found in open areas. Let’s learn more about these impressive birds of prey. (Bob Frank photos)

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)



This medium-sized hawk of the woodlands, is often heard before it is seen. No doubt you have heard the call of a Red Shouldered hawk, so loud it has earned the name of America’s “most vocal hawks.” Males are 15-23” long; Females slightly larger at 19-24”. Their wingspan can range from 35- 50”. Adults have brownish heads, reddish chests, and pale bellies with reddish bars. Their long tails are marked with narrow white bars. Red “shoulders” are visible when the birds are perched.

These hawks' upper parts are dark with pale spots and they have long yellow legs. With good hearing and sight, Red-shouldered hawks search for prey while perched on a treetop or

soaring over woodlands. When they sight prey, they kill it by dropping directly onto it from the air. They are carnivores, feeding on small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds.



American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)



Kestrels are members of the falcon family (not Hawk family), and are most easily distinguished by their hunting behavior; hovering at a height of around 35–65 feet over open country and swooping down on prey, usually small mammals, lizards or large insects. (Other falcons often hunt in flight.) Kestrels are notable for usually having mostly brown in their plumage.

This Kestrel size ranges from 8-12” in length with a wingspan of 20-24”. Roughly the size of a Mourning Dove, the Kestrel has a larger head, longer & narrow wings, and long, square-tipped tail. In flight, its wings are often bent and the wingtips swept back. They are pale when seen from below and warm, rusty brown spotted with black above, with a black band near the tip of the tail. They have pairs of black vertical slashes on the sides of their pale faces, sometimes called a “mustache” and a “sideburn.”

While populations of these Hawks and Kestrels are currently quite strong, food shortages due to loss of vegetation & use of pesticides and degradation of habitat from urban development continue to challenge all of our wildlife friends. Working together implementing our ponds and preserves management strategies will help keep our favorite wildlife creatures visiting our community often. We love our wildlife friends!