

A hike through any East Bay Regional Park, no matter the season, will provide the visitor with spectacular views. Often, upon looking up, the hiker will be treated to the breathtaking sight of a majestic bird of prey riding thermal updrafts against a backdrop of brilliant blue. Soaring, spinning, diving, kiting, these aerial acrobats are graceful masters of the skies. Yet, to songbirds, meadow voles, rabbits, snakes, and lizards, these powerful and efficient airborne hunters must be the stuff of nightmares.

Fierce predators, raptors are equipped with strong feet and needle-sharp talons, keen eyesight (some are three times as sharp as humans), and powerful hooked bills. Designed for killing, their dietary preferences vary widely as do their hunting styles.

Hawks, eagles, and falcons are diurnal predators, looking for prey during daylight hours, whereas most species of owls are nocturnal or nighttime hunters. The turkey vulture, although equipped with a strong bill, has weak legs and feet and is an opportunistic carnivore, eating mostly carrion, leftovers from other animal species or road-kills. Some hawks, like the Cooper's and sharp-shinned, are woodland hunters skilled at maneuvering with speed and agility between tree trunks and branches to snatch unsuspecting songbirds. Others, like the red-tailed, are open-country hawks soaring over hills and grasslands in search of unwary rodents.

Nesting sites and habits are highly variable with some species choosing tree cavities while others nest on the ground or build stick platforms high in the foliage canopy.

In addition, all raptor young are considered "altricial" or blind and helpless at birth. Newly hatched young are covered with downy fuzz and show their "egg tooth" a small horny nub on the upper bill, which allows the bird to break open its shell. This structure, which falls off soon after hatching occurs, provides evidence of the ancestral connection between birds and reptiles since young snakes and lizards also possess an egg tooth. Both male and female raptor parents are involved in the care and feeding of their babies which take several weeks to reach fledgling maturity. Even after fledging, a begging young raptor will often receive hand-outs from an attentive parent.

As birding becomes an increasingly popular pastime, identifying the abundantly varied species which inhabit our yards and local parks can be a fun and exciting challenge. Birds of prey with their comparatively large size, conspicuous appearance and graceful flight patterns can be some of the easiest and most thrilling to recognize. With some basic knowledge of field markings, identifying your local raptor can be a snap, especially if you are equipped with a pair of binoculars.

The following descriptions will help you learn our common, resident raptors. Once you are "bitten by the birding bug" you can use a field guide (see "Further Reading") to identify spring and fall migrants. Additionally, many informative birding programs are offered by East Bay Regional Park District Naturalists.

of both species provides excellent camouflage when these birds are perched quietly within the woodland canopy. Look for them while hiking by pausing periodically to peer into dense thickets. You may surprise yourself with a lucky sighting. Both the sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawk are listed by the state as "species of special concern."

#### FURTHER READING:

The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America, David Allen Sibley, ISBN 0-679-45121-8

Birds of Northern California, David Fix and Andy Bezener, ISBN 1-55105-227-X

Raptors of California, Hans Peeters & Pam Peeters, ISBN 0-520-24200-9



Golden Gate Audubon Society's website

The East Bay Regional Park District is dedicated to establishing parklands for all to enjoy while protecting thousands of acres of wildlife habitat. As natural habitat in surrounding areas is reduced, the need to protect vulnerable wildlife becomes increasingly vital. We hope that as you learn more about the natural history of our area, you will choose to become a conservationist and steward of our precious Bay Area wildlands.



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**Red-tailed Hawk** (also bottom cover photo)  
*Buteo jamaicensis*  
L 18-25" WS 46-58"

A large brownish hawk with dark borders on the leading edge of its wings soars on seemingly motionless wings over grassy hillsides. Watch the fanned tail closely as the bird dips and turns. Caught in sunlight at the right angle the rust-red coloration of the tail feathers on the adult red-tailed hawk is revealed. One of California's most common hawks, this bird often perches on utility poles, tree limbs, and rock outcrops where its distinctive horizontal streaked brown belly-band is easily seen. This helps to identify even the immature red-tailed, which has a brown and white banded tail during its first year. The well-known squealing scream of this hawk is another of its distinguishing characteristics, although many jays can produce an imitation call which is similar. Light and dark phases in plumage are common with this hawk and can cause difficulty with identification. To avoid confusion, look for the belly-band, the patagials (a dark bar on the underside of each wing at the wrist) and

listen for the call. Red-tailed hawks prey on small mammals, as well as birds, reptiles, and amphibians.



Jerry Ting

**Red-shouldered Hawk**  
*Buteo lineatus*  
L 19" WS 40"

This colorful hawk is a perch-hunter. Selecting a prominent position on a high branch or post with a good view of fields, ponds, and lakes, the red-shouldered waits and watches, ready to pounce on mice, snakes, and frogs. Smaller than the red-tailed hawk, the red-shouldered has prominent rust-red shoulder patches and striking white-edged, charcoal-gray body feathering. Nesting high in tree crotches, pairs of red-shouldered hawks become quite vocal, producing loud shrieking call-sequences as they defend their nesting and hunting territory.

L = Body length from bill tip to tail tip  
WS = Wing span

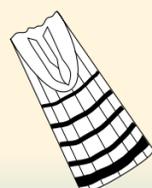


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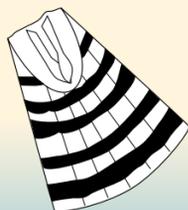
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**Sharp-shinned & Cooper's Hawks**  
*Accipiter striatus* & *Accipiter cooperii*  
L 12" WS 24" L 17" WS 37"

Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks inhabit forested groves and patches of dense vegetation where they fly swiftly, silently, and with great agility between networks of branches in pursuit of their preferred prey: small birds. Both species sometimes shock homeowners by snatching unwary songbirds from their bird feeders. So similar are these species in their appearance and behavior that they must be distinguished by size and tail shape. The Cooper's hawk (see photo) is larger in both length and wingspan than its smaller relative and has a distinctly rounded tail, while the "Sharpie" has a sharply squared tail. The mottled coloring



sharp-shinned hawk



Cooper's hawk

#### Visitor Centers & Recreation Services

ARDENWOOD HISTORIC FARM  
Fremont, 510-544-2797  
awvisit@ebparks.org

BLACK DIAMOND MINES  
Antioch, 510-544-2750  
bdvisit@ebparks.org

COYOTE HILLS REGIONAL PARK  
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chvisit@ebparks.org

CRAB COVE at CROWN BEACH  
Alameda, 510-544-3187  
ccove@ebparks.org

SUNOL REGIONAL WILDERNESS  
Sunol, 510-544-3249  
svisit@ebparks.org

TILDEN NATURE AREA/VEE  
and LITTLE FARM  
Berkeley, 510-544-2233  
tnarea@ebparks.org

OUTDOOR RECREATION UNIT  
District-wide programs, 510-544-2512  
recreation@ebparks.org

TILDEN, BOTANIC GARDEN  
Berkeley, 510-544-3169  
bgarden@ebparks.org  
www.nativeplants.org

This brochure is provided as a public service of the Interpretive and Recreation Services Department of the East Bay Regional Park District.

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## Common Raptors of the East Bay Regional Parks



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