



The Ferrum Nature Society Bulletin

Dedicated to the appreciation and conservation of our natural world

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Stay tuned for Frogs and Toads!



In just a few weeks, the voices of the Spring Peeper, American Toad, and other frogs and toads will fill the evening. Already calling are Wood Frogs who start early in their reproductive courtship in order for their young to complete metamorphosis before their vernal pools dry up.

Sky calendar:

Full moon - March 21.

Vernal equinox - Spring arrives at 1:48 AM on March 21.

Planets - Mars and Saturn can be observed near the moon during the middle of the month. Jupiter can be observed before dawn.



Leo - This constellation can be observed near the moon in the middle of this month.

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Basking with the Painted Turtle

David Szyal

The Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys picta*) is a brightly marked, moderate-sized turtle and is one of the seven species of basking turtles. It is found throughout most of Virginia with the exception of some western counties and most of the barrier islands of the Eastern Shore. This species inhabits areas where there is permanent water, including soft-bottomed streams, creeks, lakes or ponds, marshes, and swamps. Preferred habitat contains aquatic vegetation, soft substrate and basking sites.

The Painted Turtle gets its name from the design on its underside, or plastron, that looks painted. The shell, or carapace, is slightly flattened and smooth, with no ridge and ranging in color from olive to dark brown. The lines on the head and neck do not vary greatly in width and are red, becoming yellow on the head with two bright yellow spots behind the eyes. The limbs and tail are dark brown to black with narrow red stripes or dashes.

Painted Turtles are omnivores, eating aquatic plants, worms, minnows, insects, and dead fish. Their habit is to forage for several hours in the morning and late afternoon. Between foraging, the painted turtle basks in bouts of about two hours. Hibernation occurs in water under logs and stumps and in muskrat and beaver lodges.

Mating occurs in the water after hibernation. In courtship, the male swims to the front of the female and caresses the sides of her head with the backs of the claws on his outstretched forelegs. The painted turtle lays one to two clutches annually. On the average, each clutch may contain 2-23 oval eggs about an inch long and wide and is deposited in a nest 4-6 inches deep in the soil. Incubation averages 67 days. Less than half of the hatchlings survive for more than a year.

Although the shell protects the Painted Turtle from its predators, raccoons may predate on painted turtles during all life stages. Other predators that prey on eggs and juvenile turtles

include snapping turtles, snakes, alligators, hawks, and foxes. Humans have also affected their populations through destruction of their natural habitats, road kills, shooting them for sport, and collecting for the pet trade.



Todd Fredericksen

Painted Turtles are sold as pets and adults do well in captivity. The babies do not do as well in captivity and need a high calcium and vitamin diet. It is illegal to sell painted turtles under 5 inches unless they are certified free of Salmonella bacteria.

MASTER NATURALIST BASIC TRAINING

Begins April 1, 2008 for the Blue Ridge Foot-hills and Lakes Chapter.

Check out <http://www.brfal.org/> for details



A Tale of Two Hawks

Red-tailed Hawk

Eric Dalton

The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is a bird full of beauty with superb hunting skills. It has overcome illegal hunting and now thrives in Virginia. This species is the most common and widespread hawk in North America. It breeds from Central Alaska to Central America and the West Indies.

The color of the Red-tailed Hawk is distinct. The underbelly is lighter than the back of the bird with a dark brown band around its stomach. The red tail feathers give this hawk its name.

The preferred habitat for the Red-tailed Hawk is mixed forests and fields, with high bluffs or trees that may be used as perch sites. This species is the most common and wide-



Bill Garland

www.fws.gov

The Red-tailed Hawk is a carnivorous and opportunistic feeder. Small rodents, rabbits, snakes, and lizards are its favorite foods. It will also eat beetles which are only a fraction of the size of the hawk. The Red-tailed Hawk will sit high in a tree or other high perch and swoop down catching and killing its prey with its razor-sharp talons. Then the hawk will rip apart its prey and devour it with its pointed beak.

Nests are made usually in trees or on cliffs at a height of 35-75 ft. depending on the area. Red-tailed Hawks make their nests out of sticks and twigs about ½ inches in diameter. The mating pair shares the responsibility in making the nest. The nests are built very sturdy and are used year after year. After the eggs hatch, the parents share the responsibility of taking care of the young. Red-tailed Hawk chicks are mostly pure white just after hatching.

There are over one million Red-tailed Hawks currently living in the United States. Even though they are not even close to being endangered, they are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

spread hawk in North America. The Red-tailed Hawk has benefited from the conversion of forests to fields because hawks often use open areas for hunting. Some trees are required, however, for nesting places. The development of roads, especially with grassy edges, gives the hawk a perfect place for perching and hunting.

Red-shouldered Hawk

Chris McDonnell

The Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) is one of the more noble creatures of the hawk family. A common forest-dwelling hawk of the eastern U.S. and California, the Red-shouldered Hawk favors forested areas near water. It is one of the most vocal of American hawks.

The Red-shouldered Hawk is large with broad wings, relatively long tail, and a heavy body. The female is larger than the male. This characteristic is known as reverse sexual size dimorphism. The Red-shouldered Hawk has a rather short wingspan compared to other birds. Adult Red-shouldered Hawks have a brown head, a dark brown back and reddish under parts with dark brown streaks.



www.nps.gov

Red-shouldered hawks usually inhabit mature deciduous or mixed deciduous-conifer forests and swamps. They build their nests 6-15 meters above the ground in the branches of deciduous trees in wet woodland areas. They prefer to have dead trees nearby, where they can perch and enjoy an unobstructed view of the forest floor. Red-shouldered hawks are highly adaptable to human-altered habitats, including urban areas.

This hawk is monogamous and the male and female are often seen soaring together in broad circles while calling and sometimes diving toward one another. The female lays 3 to 4 white eggs with brown or lavender blotches. Incubation begins when the first or second egg is laid and lasts for 33 days. Chicks begin to leave the nest at 6 weeks, but are fed by the parents for another 8-10 weeks.

Biologists recognize seven different calls given by Red-shouldered Hawk adults. The most common call is "kee-aah". This call is used to announce that a territory is occupied or when the birds are alarmed.

The diet consist of small mammals with the largest being rabbits and squirrels. Snakes, toads, frogs and lizards are also part of the diet. 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 may catch food near their nest so they that they have food to eat later.