

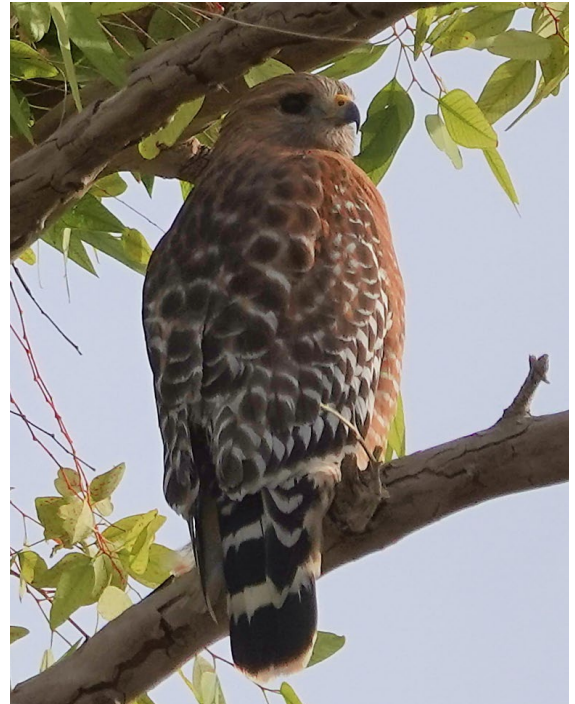
SPECIES OF THE MONTH**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK****AUGUST 2026**

The Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) is a relative newcomer to Arizona. The first documented record is of an unsuccessful nesting attempt near Mittry Lake, Yuma County in 1970. The second record is of an adult at Redington Pass near Tucson, Pima County in 1975-1976. The third sighting was along the Bill Williams River, La Paz County, 1977-78. By 1982, there were nearly 30 reports in the state, and since then the species has become an annual winter visitor and localized nesting species. It has been reported in 10 of Arizona's 15 counties. The increasing numbers stem from an eastward expansion of the California subspecies (*B. l. elegans*).

Beginning in 1999 during the Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas surveys, additional nesting attempts were documented near the Virgin River, Mohave County, and Hassayampa River Preserve near Wickenburg, Maricopa County. Birds have been reported at the latter location every summer since then and likely nested. Two successful nesting attempts were documented in 2019, and in 2020 there were 3 successful nesting attempts. A breeding population has now been established and is resident there, and adults with juvenile birds have been seen in Yuma since 2014.

Found only in North America, the Red-shouldered Hawk has 5 recognized subspecies, 4 of which are found east of the Great Plains. The *B. l. elegans* subspecies, which is most often reported in Arizona, occurs from southwestern Oregon along the Pacific coast and central California through northern Baja California, Mexico. Other than the very localized resident birds, most reports in Arizona are during fall and winter along wooded riparian areas in western and southern parts of the state. Considered a woodland buteo, the Red-shouldered Hawk has relatively short wings and a long tail that helps it maneuver through forests. It rarely appears in the open, which makes it one of our more difficult hawks to see, and with its distinctive high, clear squealing call is more likely to be heard than seen. It feeds on small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and occasionally birds and invertebrates.

Unlike many other buteos, the Red-shouldered Hawk does not have dark and light plumage variants. Both male and female adults are distinguished by their rusty upperwing coverts and solid red-orange underparts, which is why *B. l. elegans* is sometimes known as the "Red-bellied Hawk." Other subspecies have more barring on the breast and appear duller. The wings are 2-toned below, with rufous underwing coverts contrasting with black-and-white wing lining. If spotted in the right light during flight, a translucent crescent-shaped patch can be seen near the tips of their broad wings. Flight feathers are boldly checkered black-and-white, and the tail has several wide dark bars alternating with narrow white bars and a white tip. Adults are not likely to be confused with other hawks. Juveniles are distinctly different from adults as the rufous shoulders are duller and the black-and-white barring on the tail and wings is less pronounced. Moreover, the back and wing coverts are brownish rather than red. These birds may be confused with immature Harris's Hawks, which also have rufous shoulders and barring on the front.



Red-shouldered Hawk, Yuma, AZ, 1 January 2026.
Photo by Henry Detwiler