

LENGTH: 23"  
WINGSPAN: 63"

♂ + ♀  
Same size



## Osprey

*Pandion haliaetus*

These raptors are the only species whose front talons can turn backwards, presumably as an aid in grasping slippery fish, their primary prey. Osprey are usually found near rivers, lakes, and in coastal areas.

They hover at 30-100 feet, and then make a dramatic plunge, feet first into the water. They can take shallow dives or deep plunges, depending on the available fish.

Osprey often nest each year in colonies, using large platforms built of sticks.



LENGTH: 18"  
WINGSPAN: 45" ♀ > ♂

## Northern Harrier

*Circus cyaneus*

The Northern Harrier is usually found in open grasslands and in marshy areas. They hunt low over the ground, holding their wings in a shallow V-shape. They are very agile flyers, swooping with graceful aerobatics.

Although the male is gray with black wing tips, and the female is mostly brown, they both have a distinctive white patch at the base of their long tails. They also have owl-like facial disks to focus sounds so they can locate prey with great precision.

Favorite prey includes rodents, small vertebrates, voles, snakes, frogs, and insects, especially grasshoppers.



LENGTH: 26"  
WINGSPAN: 67"

♂ + ♀  
Same size

## Turkey Vulture

*Cathartes aura*

Turkey vultures are misunderstood benefactors of our environment. They clean up dead carcasses, thus preventing the spread of the putrefying smells and bacteria coming from the dead creatures that they feast upon.

Turkey Vultures' heads are bare of feathers, and the reddish-looking skin has many bumps and blotches. They are amazingly resistant to the microbial toxins they are exposed to daily. They can find dead carcasses with their uniquely developed sense of smell, which is rare in birds.

In flight, these raptors are constantly tipping and tilting to correct their flight pattern on rising thermal air masses.

## Code of Birding Ethics

(Adapted from the Audubon Society)

- Observe birds quietly. Do not throw things at or chase birds. Do not "trash about" the bush to flush birds.
- Avoid approaching a nest, or parents at a nest, too closely. Do not handle eggs or young.
- Use tape recorders with discretion to prevent driving birds from their territories.
- Bird in small groups. Walk in a single file line or spread out to prevent damage to surrounding habitats.
- Do not "tree whack" to arouse cavity dwellers.
- Avoid trespassing fragile habitats, especially marshes, grasslands, and wildflowers. Stay on established trails.
- Do not trespass onto private property without written permission.
- Please do not litter.

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484 East Street, Livermore, CA 94550

# BIRDS of PREY

Life as a bird has the fascinating advantage of flight. Fortunately, we have some of the best birding in the Bay Area here in Livermore. Within the realm of raptors soaring in the open skies, there will surely be magnificent birds that will take your breath away.



LENGTH: 9"  
WINGSPAN: 22" ♀ > ♂

## American Kestrel

*Falco sparverius*

American Kestrels are one of the smallest and most delicate members of the family of falcons, with long wings and long tails that allow for light and buoyant flight. They are commonly seen in open country and in urban areas.

When Kestrels perch, they bob their tails, possibly as a balancing aid. Kestrels often perch on roadside utility wires or they can be spotted hovering briefly above possible prey. At the best possible moment, they swoop down, intent on capturing a meal in their sharp talons. Their diet includes small vertebrates, small mammals, reptiles, and insects of all kinds, especially grasshoppers.

Kestrels nest in tree cavities, using little, if any, nesting materials. The female typically lays four to six eggs, and often the pair raises two broods each year.



LENGTH: 17"  
WINGSPAN: 40" ♀ > ♂

## Red-shouldered Hawk

*Buteo lineatus*

Red-shouldered Hawks live in riparian woodlands. You can identify them by their orangish-red breast and shoulders. They are known as still hunters, watching intently from low perches, and then making short swoops to capture their prey. Frogs, snakes, crayfish, small mammals, insects, and occasionally small birds are the main items in their diet.

Red-shouldered Hawks build their nests close in on branches, near the tree's trunk, but as high as 20 to 60 feet up. The hawks routinely add fresh green leaves to the lining that contain natural pesticides such as hydrocyanic acid, which helps to inhibit infestation by insect parasites. They may also use water-resistant substances found in lichens and spider webs to line the nest. All of this in the best interests of nurturing the eggs and the young nestlings.

These hawks use their nests year after year, until it is no longer useful, at which time they use it as an eating platform, after building a new nest in the vicinity. The mated pair and their kin will usually remain in the same territory for many years.

LENGTH: 15"  
WINGSPAN: 39"  
♂ + ♀  
Same size



## White-tailed (Black-Shouldered) Kite

*Elanus leucurus*

These distinctive and graceful hunters are found in open country and in riparian woodlands. They are easily identified by their white feathering, small patches of black feathers at the shoulders, long white tails, and red eyes.

White-tailed Kites hunt by hovering in mid-air with their feet dangling, and then dropping down suddenly, making a kill with their sharp, hooked bills. Favorite prey items of the kite include voles and other rodents, snakes, lizards, frogs, small birds, and large insects.

White-tailed Kites build their nests in treetops, so that the nests are camouflaged from the bottom, but open to the sky. These nests can be flimsy or well made, depending on the maturity of the mated pair, and are often used perennially. Kites line their nests with twigs, grass, moss, and small pieces of bark. They will choose a site 15 to 60 feet from the ground, depending on the individual species of tree.

Male kites will do all the hunting for the female during incubation. Both parents hunt for the young until the fledglings are well-developed enough to hunt and feed themselves.

In the winter, kites will roost communally. It is thought that because the older kites are more skilled hunters, they may lead younger, less experienced birds to areas of abundant prey. In return, the mature kites rely on the extra numbers of young birds for safety from possible predators—definitely a win-win relationship.



LENGTH: 19"  
WINGSPAN: 48" ♀ > ♂

## Red-tailed Hawk

*Buteo jamaicensis*

Of all the *Buteo* (broad-winged family of hawks), the Red-tailed Hawk is the most common resident in North America. You can see them in woodlands and in open country with scattered trees. They often soar 100 feet or more up in the sky, catching thermals for lift. From beneath, you can identify them by the rusty-red tail and pattern of black patagial feathers at the leading edges of their wings.

These hawks catch and kill prey with their feet. They prefer rodents, but will also take birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, crayfish, and occasionally some insects.

When it is time to build a nest, they choose a site in the crotch of a large tree with a very good view of the land. They build a bulky nest of sticks and twigs, and line it with bark strips, evergreen sprigs, and fresh green tree leaves. They replenish the lining frequently. Over time, they will alternate between nests each year.

Like most of the hawks, their vision is two to three times sharper than human vision. For example, they can see a small rodent a mile away. Their eyes are so large relative to their skulls, that they cannot rotate the eyes in the sockets. Instead, they must turn their heads frequently to align the field of view. Juvenile Red-tailed Hawks have yellow-colored eyes, turning to red-brown as they mature.