



Bird Residents of the Nature Center

Tanner the Red-tailed Hawk

Personal History:

Tanner came to the Nature Center from the California Raptor Center in March 1998. He was brought to the Raptor Center when he was less than one year old with a broken humerus and shoulder injury. Because of these injuries, Tanner's flying was permanently impaired, making him non-releasable. With permission from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the Raptor Center transferred Tanner to the Nature Center. He came to his new home even before his adult plumage came in. Tanner has a very calm personality.



Natural History: Red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

Description: As the name implies, adult red-tailed hawks have a tail that is uniformly reddish above, lighter pink beneath. However, the tail of the juvenile is finely barred. The juvenile also has a white chest which turns reddish in maturity, and both have a dark belly band. The red-tail's body is heavier than most hawks, and their other plumage can be quite variable. They have a light-colored wrist area that can look like a headlight when flying head-on. The bird averages 18 inches in length, with a wingspan of 48 inches.

Habitat: These highly adaptable hawks are common throughout California year-round and at almost all elevations. They frequent grasslands, croplands, open brushlands and open strands of deciduous trees. They are not migratory, except possibly to move to lower elevations in winter and back to higher elevations in summer and fall. They roost in tall trees.

Feeding: Red-tailed hawks feed on small birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals up to the size of a hare. They also occasionally feed on carrion. The hawks search by soaring, sometimes hovering on air currents. They may also perch and pounce, or pounce on prey from low flights. Most feeding takes place in early morning or late afternoon.

Reproduction: Courtship begins as early as January and breeding takes place from March to July. Nests are usually built 30-70 feet above ground in large trees near openings in older forests, especially riparian deciduous woods. They may occasionally nest on cliffs or low ledges, on man-made structures, or in isolated trees or cacti. The female hawk may lay 2-5 eggs in March or April, which hatch in 28-32 days. In 40-45 days, the chicks have fledged.

General Information: Great horned owls commonly use old red-tailed hawk nests, and occasionally Golden Eagles do also. These eagles may prey on adult red-tails. Scrub jays and other bird and mammal predators take undefended hawk eggs and nestlings.