

THE FALCONS

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)

The peregrine is a mid-sized raptor (1-1½ ft long, 1½ - 3½ lbs., 3 - 3½ ft wingspan) with long, sharp wings and a long tail. It is dark blue-gray above with a dark head and sideburns. It is white-breasted below with horizontal barring otherwise. It occupies shorelines, cliffs and bridges. Its call is a series of loud

harsh *kak-kak-kaks*. It has the very widest geographical range of any raptor species in the world and can be found in many areas across every continent.

DID YOU KNOW? THE WORLD'S FASTEST ANIMAL:

The peregrine falcon is capable of reaching speeds over 200 MPH when its executing steep "hunting stoop" dives at prey. This easily makes it the fastest animal in the world.

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*)

The merlin is a small falcon (~1 ft long, ½ lb., 1½ - 2+ ft wingspan) with pointed wings and mid-length tail. It is gray to brown above, white-chested with streaks and barred wings below. It lacks eyestripes that kestrels have. It lives in forests, eats birds and insects and has a shrill chattering call.

American Kestrel (*Falco*)

The merlin is the smallest U.S. raptor (¾ - 1 ft long, >½ lb., 1½ - 2 ft wingspan). Males are brown with grey-blue wings above, two black eyestripes. Females are browner above. Below, it is barred w/ thick tail bar. It lives in open fields, eats insect and small animals, and call is an excited series of loud *klees*.

A BEAT ON FALCONS: Falcons are perched in another family tree. They may look like hawks, but genetic studies in the early 2000s showed that falcons are more closely related to parrots and parakeets than to other birds of prey.

THE VULTURES

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

The turkey vulture is a large raptor (~2 - 2½ ft long, 4½ lbs., 5½ - 6 ft wingspan). It is dark brown above, a red featherless head and dark brown with white flight feathers below. This scavenger feeds on carrion, often seen tending to carcasses on road-sides or circling in a V shape on updrafts.

Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*)

The black vulture is a large raptor (2+ ft long, 3½ - 4+ lb., 5½ - 6 ft wingspan). It is almost entirely black, with silvery wing tips below. As a scavenger it feeds on carrion. It is originally native to the southeastern U.S. but over the last few decades, it has expanded its range into New York and New England.

THE OWLS

Great-Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)

Our largest owl (1½ - 2+ ft long, 2 - 5+ lbs., 3 - 4½+ ft wingspan) has a thick body, round head, large ear tufts, and large yellow eyes. Gray-brown above, it is white with brown speckling and wing barring below. It lives and hunts in forests on a wide range of prey. A hoot owl, it has a *hoo-h' hoo-hoo-hoo* call.

Barred Owl (*Strix varia*)

It is a mid-sized to large owl (~1½ + ft long, 1 - 3+ lbs., 3½+ ft wingspan) with no ear tufts, a stocky body, round head, and black eyes. It is brown with white mottling above and below. It lives and hunts in forests and swamps for mostly rodents. A hoot owl, its 8-9 note hoot call famously mimics "*Who cooks for you?*"

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

This mid-sized owl (~1+ ft long, 1 - 2 lbs., 3 - 4 ft wingspan) has a white heart-shaped face with large dark eyes, is red-brown and gray above and white below. It hunts open areas like fields, marshes, and brush for rodents and commonly nests in barns - hence its name. Its call is a harsh, two-second scream.

Eastern Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*)

Along with saw-whet owls, this is our smallest owl (~½ ft+ long, ~½ lb., 1½ - 2+ ft wingspan). It has a short, stocky body; small ear tufts and yellow eyes. It is gray or red-brown and lighter below with mottling all over. It lives in forests and hunts a variety of small animals. Its calls include its bounce tremolo and a shrill whinny.

BASIC WILDLIFE SAFETY REVIEW

Do these things to keep people and animals safe:

- **NEVER FEED WILDLIFE** - Nuisance animal issues often begin over food. Feeding wild animals is illegal.
- **KEEP YOUR DISTANCE** - Never approach, corner or handle wildlife. Risks incl. disease, bite, & scratch.
- **REPORT ANIMAL ISSUES** - Call a wildlife responder if human or animal well-being is a concern.

REPORTING WILDLIFE ISSUES

Know when and what to report and who to contact

- **WHEN TO REPORT:** Call right away If you see wildlife 1) near where people are 2) is being fed or baited. 3) hurt, sick or acting odd. 4) has been harvested illegally.
- **WHAT TO REPORT:** Be sure to say: 1) when & 2) where wildlife issue happened, 3) what the animal did 4) where animal is (if known), 5) your name, phone number.
- **CALL:** For a bat indoors: Service Desk (315) 774-9240 or Balfort Beatty/ODIA. Otherwise: MP Sgt Desk: (845) 938-3333 (anytime) NRS: (646) 208-9431 (M-F 0745-1630)

BIRDS OF PREY

OF THE WEST POINT

MILITARY RESERVATION



West Point Natural Resources Section (NRS)
Bldg 667A Ruger Road
USAG—West Point, NY 10996
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THE BIRDS OF PREY OF WEST POINT

Birds of prey (or raptors, as they are otherwise known) are some of the most awe-inspiring avians in the world. Eagles, hawks, osprey, falcons and owls are admired and celebrated for their power, speed, remarkable senses, and fierce talons that lend them their impressive predatory prowess. Vultures, although occupying a markedly different ecological niche, are commonly included in this group and for their part, command a fear and respect of their own.

Here at West Point alone, more than twenty species of raptors have been found. This brochure seeks to inform readers a bit about these twenty species including a little about how to identify them, their preferred habitats and diets, and more. In the limited space available here there was hardly time to thoroughly examine one species, much less twenty, so while we hope it helps informs readers, this brochure is by no means a comprehensive guide.

For more see NYSDEC's website: www.dec.ny.gov

Migratory Bird Treaty Act - MBTA: Passed in 1918 to protect migratory birds, this landmark federal law today prohibits the hunting, harming, catching and selling of almost 1100 bird species and their parts.

THE EAGLES

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



The bald eagle is large raptor (2½ - 3½ ft long, 8-12+ lbs., 6-8 ft wingspan). Adults are brown with white heads and tails. Immatures are dark brown and are mistaken for much rarer golden eagles. White patches appear with age and eagles adopt fully white heads and tails when mature.

Bald eagles are often seen at West Point on the Hudson River but also on some of our lakes and ponds. It eats mainly fish but also eats birds and carrion. It has a high-pitched, weak whistly call. It builds one of the largest bird nests in the world out of large sticks in tall, open trees.

It serves as the national symbol of the United States and it appears both the Great Seal, on many other official U.S government seals and on several rank insignia in the U.S. Military. It is also an important cultural symbol in many Native American cultures. The bald eagle has a long and complex history with humans. By the mid—1900s due to the effects of shooting and pesticides use, the species was so seriously imperiled, it was protected under BGEPA and the Endangered Species Act. The laws have let bald eagles rebound greatly - a true conservation success story.

A BEAT ON EAGLES: Bald eagles are fish eagles, live and hunt mostly near water and lack lower leg feathers. Golden eagles are booted eagles, so named for feathered lower legs. They live and hunt more often in upland areas.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)



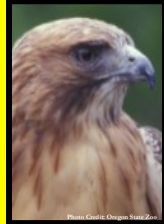
This eagle is large raptor (2½ - 3½ ft long, 8-12+ lbs., 6-8 ft wingspan) and dark brown with a gold nape and tricolored beak. When immature, it has white tail, wing patches. It hunts by soaring over open uplands, preys on rodents, rabbits, foxes, groundhogs, large birds and fawns. It has a high-pitched, weak, whistly call. It

is uncommon and wary of people and so a rare sight at West Point. It builds huge stick/plant nests, usu. on cliff-sides. It is fiercely territorial and a cultural symbol in many Native American and world traditions.

Bald & Golden Eagle Protection Act - BGEPA: Passed in 1940 to protect bald eagles and expanded to golden eagles in 1962, this federal law prohibits both harming or harassing eagles and possessing eagles and their parts.

THE HAWKS

Red-Tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)



The red-tail is large buteo hawk (1½ - 2+ ft long, 2-4 lbs., 3½ - 4½ ft wingspan). It is dark brown above and white below with dark brown midsection speckling and brown wing tips. It also has a brown head and a namesake red-brown tail. It hunts in wait on a high perch or over fields and dives on prey - usu. rodents or rabbits. It is

the most commonly seen bird of prey in the United States and West Point is no exception. Redtails can be seen perched on trees or telephone poles along roadsides and utility lines, or even circling above forested mountain sides and open artillery ranges throughout the reservation.

DID YOU KNOW? CALL OF THE WILD: The fierce, hoarse *kee-eeeeee-arr* scream of a redtail is famed but often misattributed to eagles. This sound effect used in media set in remote areas or the Old West evokes the great outdoors.

Broad-Winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*)

This is a small buteo hawk (1-1½ ft long, 1-1½ lbs., 2½ - 3 ft wingspan) with broad wings. It is brown above, white with brown bars below, a brown head and dark gray and white barred tail. It lives in forests, eats rodents, birds, frogs, and insects. It's call is a high-pitched, 2-4 second *kee-eee* whistle.



A BEAT ON HAWKS: Buteos are big, broad-wing, short-tailed hawks and sparser-flap fliers. Accipiters are smaller, short-winged, long-tailed hawk and more rapid-flap fliers. Harriers are owl-faced, long-winged, long-tailed low fliers.



Rough-Legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus*)

This is a mid-sized buteo (1½-2 ft long, 2-3 lbs., 4—4½ ft wingspan) with long wings. It has two color phases (brown or black above) both /w dark chest patch below, dark tail band, and feathering to its toes. It lives in fields hunting rodents. It is a migrant or winter resident here. Its call is a loud mew.

Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*)

This is a mid-sized buteo (1½-2 ft long, 1½ - 2 lbs., 3-3½+ ft wingspan) with long wings. It is black/white checkered above and black/white barred below with red head/body and namesake upper wings below. It lives in lowland forests and swamps, hunts rodents and frogs. Its call is a loud *kee-ah*.



Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)

A mid-sized hawk but the largest of accipiter hawks (~2 ft long, 1½ -4 lbs., 3½ -4 ft wingspan), it has broad wings and a long tail. It is dark gray above with a dark head and red and white stripe. It is white with fine gray bars below. It lives in mature forests, hunts birds, and had a rapid *ki-ki-ki-ki-ki* call.



Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*)

This is a small accipiter hawk (1¼- 1½ ft long, 1-2 lbs., 2-3 ft wingspan) with broad wings and a long tail. It is gray-blue above with a pale nape, and white with red barring below with black/white bars under outer wings. It lives in forests, hunts birds and has a loud woodpecker-like *cak-cak-cak-cak* call.



Sharp-Shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striata*)

This is a small accipiter hawk (~1 ft long, ~½ lb., 1½ -2 ft wingspan) with short wings and a long tail. It is dark gray-blue above with a dark nape and white with red-brown barring below with black/white bars under outer wings. It lives in forests and hunts birds and has a loud, high-pitched *kik-kik-kik-kik*.



Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*)

Neither a buteo nor an accipiter, it is a mid-size (1½ ft long, ~1-2 lbs., 3½-4 ft wingspan) with an owl-like face and long tail, and wings. It is gray-brown above with a white patch over its tail. A rare sight here, it flies low in a V over fields and wetlands, hunting mice. Its call is a fast *kek-kek-kek-kek*.



OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*)

A fish hawk, the osprey a mid-size raptor (2 ft long, 3-4 lbs., 5-6 ft wingspan). It is brown above, has a white head, black beak and an eye stripe. It is white below with brown wrists, and barred flight feathers. Often seen on the Hudson or our lakes, it eats fish and its call is a series of high whistling chirps.

