

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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RED TAILED HAWK

Cherokee Importance

The Red-tailed Hawk is said to be a protector spirit of the Cherokees and is therefore considered sacred. Tail feathers were and are used ceremonially. However, the bird would never be killed during collection of such. Skilled “hunters” would bait the hawks in, catch them with their hands, and then release them after collecting a few feathers.

Description

Red-tailed Hawks are a large raptor, or bird of prey. They can have several color variations, but all have the characteristic rusty red coloration atop their tail feathers. Generally, in this region, Red-tails are characterized by darker, brownish colored backs and lighter colors on the breast. Red-tailed Hawks are large birds with wingspans that reach nearly 5 feet, heights of 26 inches, and weights up to 4.5 pounds. Red-tails primarily feed upon rodents, but are also known to utilize almost any smaller animal as a food source (ranging from insects to fish). They hunt by using tall trees, cliffs, and telephone poles as vantage points where their excellent eyesight is used to spot prey from great distances. Sharp talons capture the prey items which are then dispatched with bites from their powerful beaks. Fearless hunters, Red-tails commonly prey upon large rattlesnakes even though they are not immune to their venom.

Where found:	Red-tailed hawks are found from Alaska, throughout Canada, south through the U.S., and into Mexico and Central America, and in many different types of habitats.
Other names:	Chicken hawk
Taxonomy:	Kingdom - Animalia Phylum - Chordata Class - Aves Order – Falconiformes Family – Accipitridae Genus – <i>Buteo</i> Species – <i>jamaicensis</i>

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