

Raptors: Birds of Prey



David Harper



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The Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) glides great distances with wings held almost flat as it forages for prey. It spreads its outer primary feathers like extended fingers. This species is found throughout California and in most habitats, even sometimes over cities.



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The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is most often seen soaring in circles over grasslands, valleys, and foothills. It frequently nests high on treetops. Its mottled brown coloring is variable, so look for a dark patagial patch (feathers at top of “shoulder” seen from underside) and dark spots or streaks across its belly to identify this hawk.



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The Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) is most likely to be found cruising low over fields and wetlands. Its white rump is a good identifier. Also, notice the white-edged facial disc (around the eye) somewhat resembling that of an owl.

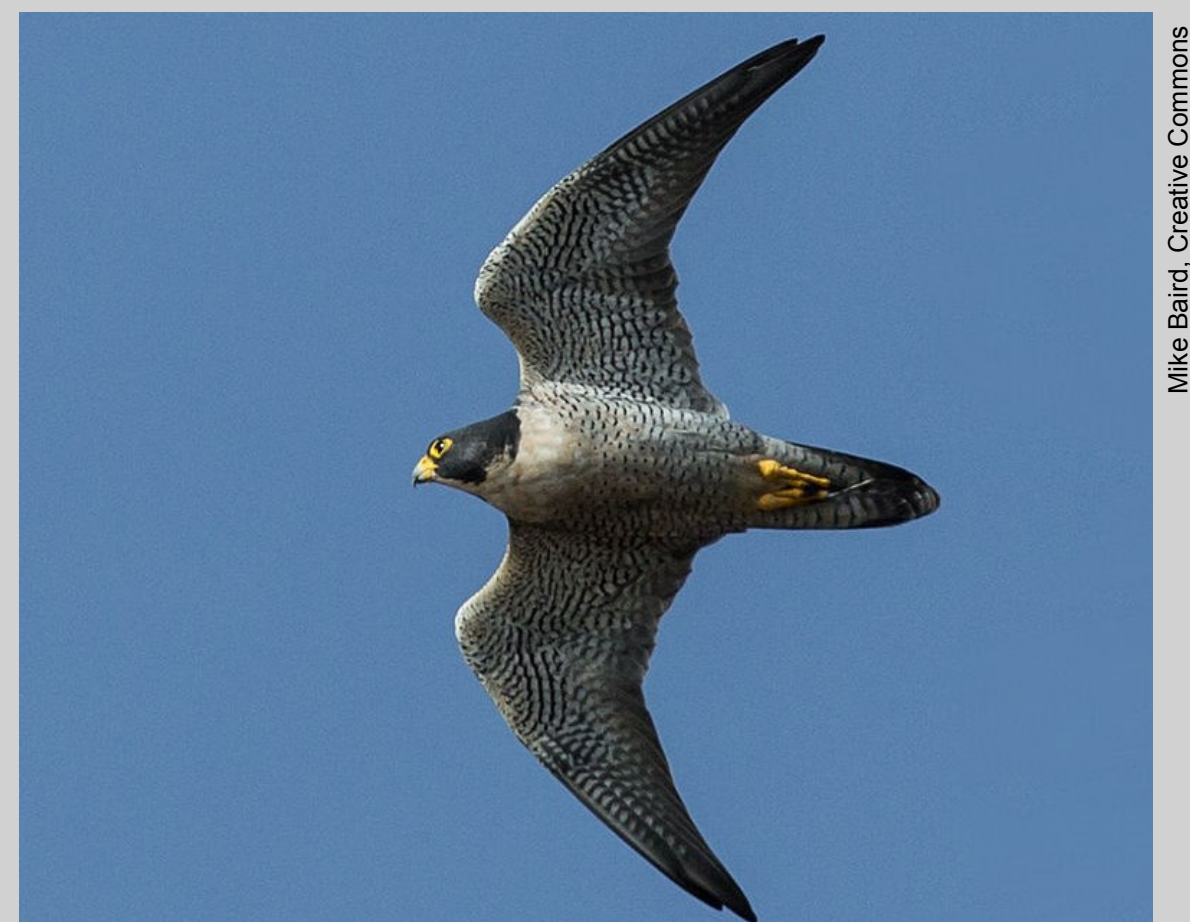
The Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) resembles the Red-tailed hawk, but is smaller with shorter wings made for flying between trees and branches in its woodland habitat. It prefers to still-hunt, looking for prey from a strategic perch.



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A distinguishing mark on the **Peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)** is its dark malar streak, a patch that extends from the lower eye to the cheek. The Peregrine is specialized for catching flying prey, such as small birds. It doesn't build nests, but instead lays eggs in depressions found high up on sides of cliffs, sea stacks, or even high-rise buildings.

Falcons are the most streamlined of raptors with tapered tails and sharply pointed wings, demonstrated by this Peregrine.



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The White-tailed Kite (*Elanus leucurus*) eats mostly voles and mice. Look for Kites in grasslands where they kite (remain suspended in air with little movement) and hover in search of favorite prey. By the way, the toy kite of your childhood is named for this raptor and its signature flying style.



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The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is the size of a dove. It often soars-hunts in search of large insects, such as dragonflies, a preferred food. If insects aren't available, it will eat lizards and small snakes.