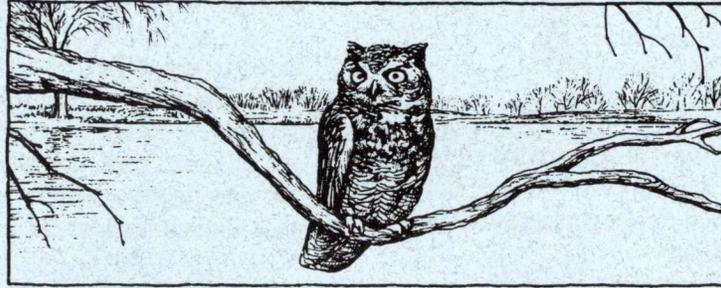


# STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



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## RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS: Bottomland Buteos

-- Mark Spreyer

*I sit in the top of my wood, my eyes closed.  
Inaction, no falsifying dream  
Between my hooked head and hooked feet:  
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat.*

*The convenience of the high trees!  
The air's buoyancy and the sun's ray  
Are of advantage to me;  
And the earth's face upward for my inspection.*

—from *Hawk Roosting* by Ted Hughes

horses' droppings. But at the time, I was just delighted to find trails that wound their way through woods and, in my neighborhood, near a small lake and stream.

It was there, in the spring, that I first heard the distinctive *kee-aah* call of a territorial red-shouldered hawk. Unlike the red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*), the red-shouldered hawk repeats its call several times and the drawn-out second syllable ends with a downward inflection. If you hear such a call be careful not to jump to conclusions. Blue jays can mimic this call to near perfection.

### Buteo Review

As the scientific names indicate, red-tails and red-shouldered hawks belong to the genus *Buteo*. Buteos

can be told by their expansive wings and fan-shaped tail. (Stillman's resident broad-winged hawk is *Buteo platypterus*.)

Red-tails are a very adaptable species that hunt rabbits and mice in open habitats. The omnipresent red-

tail perched by the roadside lead many to think that all buteos are open-country hunters, leaving the forests to the accipiters

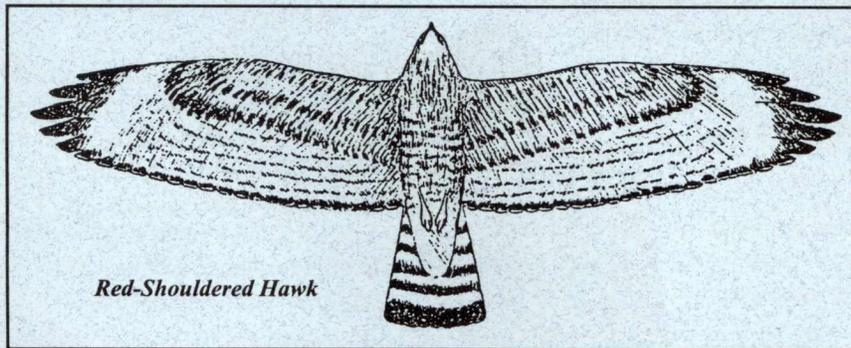
Accipiters include the sharp-shinned (*Accipiter striatus*) and Cooper's hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) which you might see hunting the birds at your backyard feeder.

In October, Stillman added a red-shouldered hawk (*Buteo lineatus*) to its collection of permanently injured raptors. The bird's imposing stare brought Hughes' poem to mind. It also reminded me of how excited I was when I discovered a nest of red-shouldered off of Ridge Road in Barrington Hills.

### The Answer Kee

It was 1983, I was renting a house that was for sale and often asked to vacate the premises when the property was being shown. Perhaps it wasn't me so much as it was Mountain, my 140-pound Alaskan malamute.

Anyway, I discovered that the Riding Club maintained around sixty miles of trails that crisscrossed the area on both public and private properties. In retrospect, I imagine some Riding Club members might have taken a dim view of encountering me and Mountain plodding through their



Red-Shouldered Hawk

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# STILLMAN NATURE CENTER

33 WEST PENNY ROAD • BARRINGTON • IL • 60010 • 847-428-OWLS (6957)



*Buteos*



*Accipiters*

In contrast to buteos, accipiters have short, rounded wings and a long, rudder-like tail (see illustration). The accipiters' body design facilitates adept aerial maneuvers required by their avian prey and wooded habitat.

As you probably know, it is never that simple in nature. Not all buteos are found in open spaces. In fact, both the broad-winged and red-shouldered hawks are forest dwelling buteos.

They keep competition to a minimum by dividing the forest habitat. Broad-wings prefer upland parcels while red-shouldered hawks hunt mice and chipmunks along moist stream bottoms and wooded swamps, similar to my old dog-walking terrain.

### Going in the Red

Given its preference for forests, it is not surprising that the red-shouldered hawk has some accipiter qualities. Compared to other buteos, for example, it has a longer tail and more rounded wing-tips. Also, its flight action often involves fast, accipiter-like flapping.

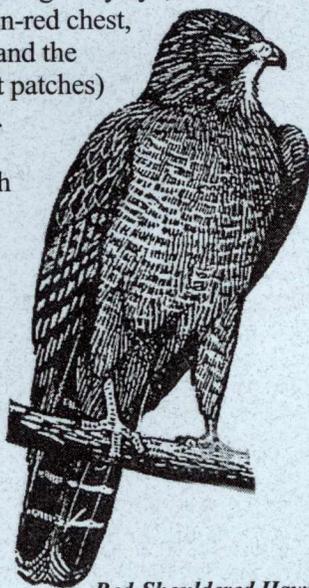
When I spotted the hawk making the call near Ridge Road, it was not the wing-tips I noticed. What caught my eye, as the bird sailed overhead, was the robin-red chest, the black tail with narrow white bands, and the "windows" (crescent-shaped translucent patches) located just inside each of the wing-tips.

Now that I've had a chance to work with a red-shouldered hawk up close and personal, I have to say that I don't think there is a better looking hawk anywhere in Illinois.

Of course, red-shouldered hawks can be found outside of the Land of Lincoln. In fact, there are four subspecies of red-shouldered hawks that range from Maine to Florida, west to east Texas, and north to central Minnesota. A fifth isolated subspecies can be found along the Pacific Coast from southern Oregon down to Baja.

### Your Neck of the Woods

Not only do the subspecies, as you might expect, vary in color but also in their tolerance of habitat alteration.



*Red-Shouldered Hawk*

Encroaching civilization has not deterred the California subspecies. It can be seen from freeways nesting in exotic trees like eucalyptus. Elsewhere in the country, this has not been so.

During most of the last two centuries, red-shouldered hawks apparently diminished from the eastern U.S. due to extensive logging. When I found that nest in 1983, it was on our state's endangered species list. The good news is that twenty years later, it was taken off the list. Luckily, once-farmed lands are reverting to forest.

However, a cautionary note is still in order. Even if a forest is merely thinned, it will no longer be attractive to a red-shouldered hawk. The less particular and more common red-tailed hawk will move in. Red-shouldered hawks prefer large tracts of woodland where, for the most part, the crowns of adjacent trees touch one another.

In this millennium, I have enjoyed visiting a nest of red-shouldered hawks located on private property in N. Barrington. It reminded me of that first nest I found so many years ago.

At the time, I called the state to see what could be done to protect this endangered species but, since the property was in private hands, there was little they could do. Fortunately for those hawks, the homeowner liked the woods and the seclusion offered by the spacious nearby properties.

This was an early lesson for me in recognizing that valuable wildlife habitat is often found outside of county forest preserves and state parks.

With this in mind, I have a small request. Should you be fortunate enough to own property that includes riparian (aka stream bank) habitat, remember the red-shouldered hawk especially if you are considering removing some trees. If the trees remain, you will not only be providing a possible nest site for the hawks but also protecting ideal habitat for shade-loving wildflowers such as trout lily, white trillium, and toothwort.

### Convenience of the High Trees

All of this brings me back for the next two stanzas of Ted Hughes' marvelous hawk poem.

*My feet are locked upon the rough bark.  
It took the whole of Creation  
To produce my foot, my each feather:  
Now I hold Creation in my foot*

*Or fly up, and revolve it all slowly—  
I kill where I please because it is all mine.  
There is no sophistry in my body:  
My manners are tearing off heads—*

## PROGRAMS

**Program Basics:** PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 28-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT: [stillnc@wildblue.net](mailto:stillnc@wildblue.net) TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs. Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

### NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

Join us for the annual New Year's Day walk along Stillman's trails. Over the years, we've seen everything from bluebirds and shrikes to the remains of multiple coyote kills. If you like winter, don't like football, or need to sober up; this is the walk for you.

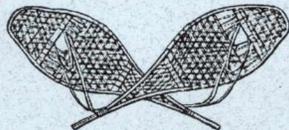
Date: Friday, Jan. 1  
Time: 10:00AM  
Age: 10 years and up



### SNOWSHOEING with L.L. BEAN

To help you sample Stillman's winter scenery in a novel way, stop by the L.L. Bean store in S. Barrington and register for an introductory snowshoeing adventure. Conditions permitting, Bean's snowshoeing classes are scheduled every Saturday and Sunday through the end of March.

Experienced snowshoers are always welcome at Stillman on any snow-covered Sunday.



### MAKING TRACKS 24/7

Join Susan Allman as she shows you how to recognize the different types of tracks made by winter's active animals. After an indoor introduction, explore Stillman's trails for signs of rabbit, squirrel, deer and fox. If there is no snow on the 24th, we'll try again on Feb 7. Remember to **call (847) 428-OWLS to make reservations.**

Date: Sundays Jan. 24 & Feb. 7  
Time: 2:00PM  
Fee: None



Please note that the Stillman Nature Center is also available during the week, by reservation, to school classes. For a brochure that describes the programs and fees, just call or check our website at: [www.stillmann.org](http://www.stillmann.org)

### OWL MOON WALK

After an indoor program on owls, we will walk the trails in search of Stillman's great horned owls. Assuming we have clear skies, we'll be able to enjoy the winter landscape by the light of the full moon. Space is limited so call (847) 428-OWLS to make reservations. Don't forget to dress warmly.

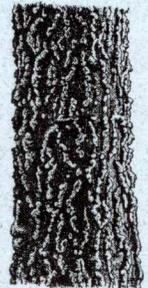
Date: Saturday, Jan. 30  
Time: 6:30PM  
Age: 8 years and up  
Member's Fee: Free  
Non-member's Fee: \$5.00



### TREE IDENTIFICATION or Sap for Sweethearts

Learn how to identify common trees such as cherry, maple, pine, and cedar. Easy to remember tips and simple hand-outs will help you get to the heartwood of the matter. Come prepared for the weather and bring your questions.

Date: Sunday, Feb. 14  
Time: 2:00PM  
Age: 10 years and up  
Fee: None



### Renewal Reminder

If you see a 9 or smaller number after your name, this will be your last newsletter until you renew. If you didn't receive our annual membership letter, just use the form on the back of this newsletter. Please remember, in order to keep Stillman a viable and diverse natural area, *we need your support.* Thank you.

### EAGLE SCOUTS TAKE WING

Four hard-working boy scouts from **Troop 29** worked at Stillman in order to earn the ranking of Eagle Scout. In particular, **Ryan Panasy** and **Vince Hensel** built wooden walkways over two particularly muddy areas on the Lakeside Trail. **Chris Boutilier** turned an overgrown orchard into an outdoor classroom by clearing brush. Chris also built a small bridge over an intermittent flowage.

Last but not least, **Jim Yeagley** built an osprey platform in hopes of attracting a pair of these magnificent fish-eating raptors. Suffice it to say that building the platform and then positioning it on the island in our lake is much easier said than done! Our nature center is much better thanks to all their efforts.

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*If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.*

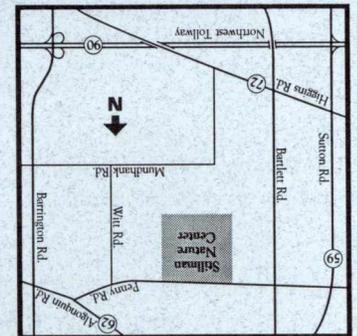
- Yes, I'd like to become or continue as a member of the Stillman Nature Center.  
I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
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