

## Bald Eagle

- Bald eagles are 28-40 inches long, have a 6-7.5ft wingspan and weigh 9-14lbs. Females are about 25% larger than males.
- Their impressive wingspan is more than decorative; it allows them to fly at dizzying heights! Bald eagles soar 10,000 feet or more into the air, using thermal air currents to support their glide. This allows them to conserve energy for more important activities, like looking for prey and migrating long distances.
- Nests are called eyries and are found at the top of tall sturdy trees.
- 1-3 eggs are laid annually in the springtime and hatch after 35 days of incubation.



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# RAPTORS



## A GLIMPSE INTO A FEW AVIAN PREDATORS



## Merlin

- The merlin is a small sized falcon, measuring about 10-13 inches in length with a wingspan of around 20-26 inches.
- Male merlins are typically smaller. They have a compact, stocky build with short, rounded wings and a long tail.
- Merlins can be found in a variety of habitats, including open woodlands, moorlands, grasslands, and tundra.
- Merlins primarily feed on small birds, such as sparrows, finches, and shorebirds.
- Known for their swift flight and powerful hunting skills, they often fly low and fast, employing surprise attacks to catch their prey.

## Red-tailed Hawk

- Adults have a distinctive red tail, and light breast with a variable dark band near their belly.
- In flight, adults have light underwings with darker wing tips and edges of flight feathers.
- Immature birds appear similar to adults but with more streaking on breast, barring under wings, and a brown barred tail.
- There are many color morphs of red-tailed hawks, ranging from completely dark brown, to almost completely white.
- Often found perched in trees, on signs, power lines, and poles along roadsides scanning for prey.



## Sharp-shinned Hawk

- Although uncommon, the sharp-shinned hawk can be seen in Iowa when it migrates South in search of warmer weather. Juveniles often take a different route on migration than the adult sharp-shinned hawks.
- Adults have blue-gray upperparts and white underparts with rufous barring.
- Named for their sharply keeled, featherless lower legs.
- Male sharp-shinned hawks are smaller than females.
- Few sharp-shinned hawks live to be five or more years of age, in part because they are fairly common in urban areas where they often prey on birds at bird feeders.
- The sharp-shinned hawk is the smallest of three North American birdhawks. The slender, blue jay-sized raptor inhabits forested areas throughout much of North, Central, and South America.

## American Kestrel

- Kestrels hide surplus kills in grass clumps, tree roots, bushes, fence posts, tree limbs, and cavities, to save the food for lean times or to hide it from thieves.
- Female and male American kestrels use different habitats. Females use the typical open habitat, and males use areas with more trees. This situation appears to be the result of the females migrating south first and establishing winter territories, leaving males to the more wooded areas.
- Due to their small size, they often end up as prey for larger birds such as northern goshawks, red-tailed hawks, barn owls, and many others.



## Osprey



- Ospreys breed in Iowa, but migrate South during the winter.
- Ospreys exclusively eat fish and are often seen near bodies of water.
- In flight, their wings are slightly bowed, creating an M-shape silhouette from below.
- Ospreys like to breed in loose colonies, and the presence of one successful pair will often attract others in following years.
- The osprey species is at least 11 million years old. Being well adapted to its water hunting lifestyle, they have evolved unique characteristics that set it apart from other raptor species. Because its primary diet is fish, the osprey's nostrils can be closed during dives, and it has an outer toe that can be angled backward to better grasp fish.

## Turkey Vulture

- Turkey vultures migrate South during the winter. When vultures return, it is seen as a sign of spring.
- A group of turkey vultures is called a committee, or a kettle if in flight, or a wake if they're feeding.
- Vultures specialize in eating carrion (carcasses of dead animals). They have been known to be able to smell carrion from over a mile away.
- Their feet are useless for ripping into prey, but the vultures have powerful beaks that can tear through even the toughest cow hide.
- The turkey vulture, also known as the turkey buzzard, is incredibly common in Iowa and the most abundant vulture in the entire country.

