



Red-Tailed Hawk in Transition

Red-tailed hawks typically acquire the brick-red tail feathers that they are named for between 2 to 3 years of age. Prior to that, they have a darkly colored barred tail. What you see in the photo here is an example of a red-tailed hawk in “transition”. It is in the process of molting the juvenile feathers and being replaced by the adult brick-red feathers. This transitional molt is rarely seen.

Look closely in the photo above and you can see that this bird is probing at the preen gland located near the base of the tail. The preen gland is important to birds in waterproofing their feathers. Note the cloudy “film” over the bird’s eye. This is the “third eyelid” or nictitating membrane.