



# “Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays  
and the *Jamestown Post-Journal* on Saturdays



## The Hawk and I

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Two years I published a "hawk" column that ended up being far more about my search to identify the bird than the Red-Shouldered itself.

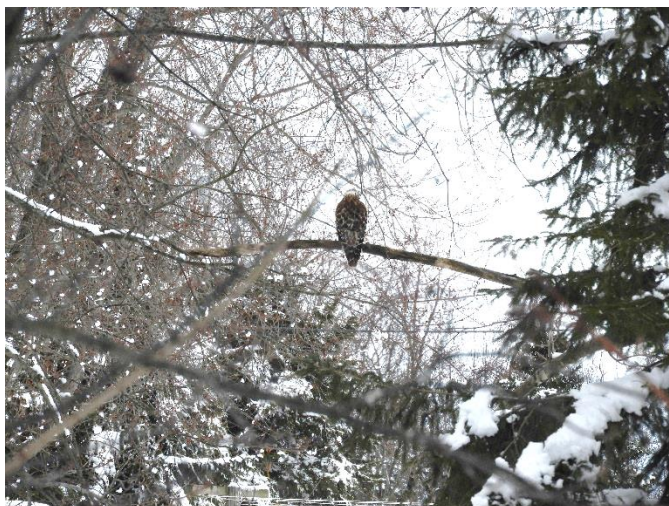


When FeederWatch questioned my identification, I simply sent the photos I had earlier sent to Twan Leenders (RTPI) with his comments. These pictures were taken in 2018, increasing closeups of the bird in a tree next door. If it was good enough for Twan, I presume it was good enough for Cornell. This time I really did see deep red on the shoulders as the 2019 bird flew by. (It had spent quite a bit of time swooping and hovering just beyond the windows where I sat also watching Sunday golf.) I promised after writing in 2019 that I would concentrate far less on me and much more on the bird.

The first Sibley Guide I picked up tells me there are different colored red-shoulders in California and Florida. Mine is "Eastern," has definite red marks on his shoulders, lighter underneath and that "scaly-looking back" I likened to a turtle's shell. It's a small forest buteo, usually found near water who perches to hunt some reptiles and amphibians (probably not around here in March) and mainly mammals. The fit is perfect.

It has a very vocal call which is a far-carrying, high clear, squealing keeyuur keeyuur which it repeats steadily. If it tires of that -- or of being imitated by a blue jay -- it might cry a high sharp kilt.

The Eastern Guide by Sibley tells us the bird is about 17" with a wing-span of 40" and weighs about 1.4 pounds. It is "uncommon in wooded areas with clearings and water." Sounds like home sweet home to me. It is "often spotted perched in a tree (as was



mine) or on poles or wires at edges of clearings, ponds or streams."

Peterson has a Guide just for Hawks with good drawings of the R-S's underside. No other hawk comes close to having what still look like circles. Funny, this book calls it a "Medium to large buteo." It gives a length of 15-19 inches, wingspan of 37-42 and weight 1.1 - 1.9 pounds. Sibley was right in the middle.



Let me quote: "Red-shouldered Hawks are vocal, and their distinctive call, especially evident during courtship, should be learned (however, Blue Jays are good at mimicking this call). Hunters of wet woodlands, the hawks sit quietly on an inconspicuous perch, searching for prey -- mammals, birds, frogs and toads, snakes and lizards, and occasionally crustaceans, fish, and insects. In winter they are seen in more open areas, but they select lower and less open perches than Red-tails.

"Red-shouldered Hawks are fond of soaring and often vocalize while in the air. They sometimes join a group of crows mobbing

larger owls and have been observed eating suet at bird feeders. (Wouldn't that be amazing!) This species nests in suburban neighborhoods.

"Red-shouldered Hawks were probably somewhat reduced in numbers by pesticides, but loss of habitat is most likely the cause of any long-term decline. Birds are now being recorded in good numbers where habitat is still available."

I'd be remiss if I didn't close with my favorite from the old (1917) Audubon "Birds of America."

"Although quite as common in many localities as the Red-tail, the Red-shouldered Hawk is less often seen, since it keeps more within the shade of woods and especially so in swampy tree-covered areas. It is a lighter-built bird than the Red-tail and more impetuous in pursuit of its prey. Its call -- a shrill kee-yoo -- is sharper and with less 'burr' on the last note.

"The Red-shouldered Hawks are very valuable to the farmer. They are more nearly omnivorous than most of our birds of prey, and are known to feed on mice, birds, snakes, frogs, fish, grasshoppers, centipedes, spiders, crawfish, earthworms, and snails. About 90 per cent of their food consists of injurious animals and insects, and hardly 1 1/2 per cent of poultry and game. It is folly to destroy this valuable bird, and everywhere it should be fostered and protected."

Written March 23, 2019