Harris’ Hawk
*Parabuteo unicinctus*

**Scientific Name**
*Parabuteo unicinctus*

**Other Names**
Bay-winged hawk, chestnut-thighed buzzard, Harris’ Buzzard, Dusky hawk

**Range**
Mexico, South and Central America to central Chile and Argentina, SW United States

**Habitat**
Semi-dry chaparral, deserts, and tropical deciduous forests

**Average Size**
Length: 17 – 24 in.
Weight:
- Male: 1.3 – 1.9 lbs.
- Female: 2 – 2.5 lbs.

**Description**
Dark brown raptor with chestnut coloring on the shoulders, underside and thighs, and a flashy white band at the tip of the tail. Females are larger than the males.

**Lifespan**
In the wild: Estimated at 12 – 14 years
In captivity: 18 – 20 years

**Diet**
In the wild: Rodents, waterfowl and reptiles
In captivity: Rats, mice and prepared carnivore meat diet

**Clutch Size**
1 – 5 eggs

**Incubation**
33 – 36 days

**Fledgling Period**
43 - 49 days

**Sexual Maturity**
1 – 3 years

**Predators**
Raven, coyotes and owls

**Population Status**
Vulnerable

**Behavior**
The crepuscular (active at dusk and dawn) Harris’ hawk is an adaptable predator who feeds on a variety of small animals and even carrion. It soars in a spiral pattern and perches on the tips of saguaro cactus, utility poles, or tall trees to get a better lookout for prey. Unlike other raptor species that are solitary, the Harris’ hawk hunts in a group with each bird playing a different role. These responsibilities change from hunt to hunt and appear to be random. Some work on the ground to flush out prey from under the thickets, while others stay perched and ready to swoop down for the kill. All hunters share the food caught.

There appears to be some hierarchy involved in these groups as observed in their “stacking” behaviors. When perching on cactus, there is only so much room. The more subservient birds are forced to lower perches or to have other birds perch on top of their backs! Like most raptors, these hawks are territorial and give loud, harsh screams when threatened.

**Reproduction and Breeding**
Breeding season is in early spring with most eggs laid April through June. Courtship takes place in mid-air, with acrobatic displays from the male and female both. The social groupings that follow often vary from the usual male/female pairing. Although monogamy is most common, polygyny (more than one female) and polyandry (more than one male) are also common. In fact, upwards of fifty percent of the population is polyandrous. With a breeding territory of one to two square miles, the additional males gives the nesting area extra protection.

The nest is made of compacted sticks, twigs and roots, fused with weeds, grasses and leaves. It is most often built into cactus, huckleberry or mesquite trees. Both sexes share in the incubation and feeding duties for the chick until they fledge at roughly two months of age.

Females may have more than one clutch per year if something happens early on to the first clutch of eggs.

**Conservation**
Harris’ hawks are relatively common throughout their range, although populations in the Southwest United States are declining. They are rapidly becoming one of the most popular species in North American Falconry due

(continued on back)
to their intelligence, agility and cooperative hunting skills. As a result, there are a large number of captive breeders for this species.

Because they are at the top of their food chain, Harris' hawks are vulnerable to pesticides and poisons that have built up in their prey. This continues to be a major threat to their stability. Loss of habitat and increased human populations in desert areas has also had a negative effect on these birds.

The Sacramento Zoo works to educate the public on how to protect and preserve native wildlife by offering solutions to living with wildlife nearby. As more and more people move to rural areas, the need for information on sharing habitats becomes crucial to the survival of many species, including humans.

**Amazing Facts**

The Harris' hawk is named for Edward Harris, a good friend of John James Audubon, who was with him when he first saw this bird.

Hawks differ from other raptors in that they do not have a notched beak and have broad, rounded wings.

There are two different sub-species of Harris' hawk that differ only in range.

---

**Harris’ Hawk**

![Map of Harris' Hawk's range](image)

The Sacramento Zoological Society
3930 West Land Park Dr., Sacramento, CA 95822
T: 916-808-5888 F: 916-264-7385 E: info@saczoo.org

saczoo.org