



## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Aggressive Birds

Because of their size, speed, and hunting skills, birds of prey (raptors) have earned awe and respect from people of all walks of life. We see this admiration of raptors in names of sports teams such as the “Eagles”, “Falcons”, and “Seahawks.”



*Red-tailed Hawk*  
Tim Ludwick/USFWS

Most birds will exhibit aggressive behavior when they feel threatened. Birds that are guarding a nest are more likely to respond aggressively towards an encroaching person or animal. The most frequent encounters involve birds such as Northern Mockingbirds or raptors that make their nests in and around human-populated areas. Northern Mockingbirds and several species of raptors may display this aggression towards humans during the nesting season, approximately January-August. Some species are more aggressive than others and may be prone to aggressive air-borne diving on intruders.

### Defensive Behavior

Individual birds defend themselves in different ways. When approached, some birds may call loudly or hiss. The vocalizations are often at a higher pitch and a sharper note, sometimes repeated angrily until the disturbance ends. Another behavior often exhibited by a distressed bird is posturing, in which the bird puffs its feathers to make itself look bigger and more threatening. In addition to this, the bird may anxiously weave back and forth. If these threat postures fail to deter a perceived intruder, then the bird may lunge or dive bomb, using its wings, talons, and bill to attack.



*Red-tailed Hawk*  
Tim Ludwick/USFWS

### What to do if you encounter an aggressive bird

Recognize the aggressive behaviors and remember that the bird is only trying to defend itself and it's young.

If the bird is nesting, stay out of the immediate area, if possible, until the young have fledged and the parents feel less threatened. Make sure people are aware of the birds by posting signs in the area. You should not get too close or attempt to handle wild birds. These birds can be very strong and can potentially do great damage to someone who seems threatening to themselves or their young.

Erect poles with flagging along walkways that are in the vicinity of the nest. When venturing in or around the bird's territory, carry an open umbrella or a stick with flags attached above your head. The raptors will attack the tallest object rather than the person. Never use these objects as weapons to attack the birds.

Place portable canopies over frequently-used walkways to provide further protection. In the event that a person or pet is attacked by a bird and the skin is broken, wash the wound and treat it with antiseptic. Birds do not carry rabies or other diseases communicable in this way.

### Recommendations for the future

Destroy the nest after the birds and young have all left. During the next breeding season, you may prevent birds from nesting in the area by destroying the nests as they attempt to build one. Be cautious of attacks during this time as well.

Hire an arborist to trim the tree before breeding season to discourage them from nesting.

### Legal Status

The birds listed above are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. It is illegal for any person to take, possess, transport, sell, or purchase them or their parts, such as feathers, nests, or eggs, without a permit.

Active nests (nests with eggs or chicks within) may not be touched or removed without a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). A nest may be active if a bird returns to the nest after 15-20 minutes and “sits” on the nest. Removal of an inactive nest does not require a permit to remove. Nest or bird removal permit applications must be justified with strong, compelling reasons such as a health and safety hazard towards humans or birds. The USFWS does not issue permits for nuisance birds.



*Red-shouldered Hawk*  
Tim Ludwick/USFWS

For further information about raptors and other migratory bird concerns, please contact: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Pacific Southwest Region, Division of Migratory Birds and Habitat at 916/978-6183 or email at [permitsR8MB@fws.gov](mailto:permitsR8MB@fws.gov).