

Wildlife Viewfinder Guide: Sky Dancer

by Tim Herd

Enrolling in a promising thermal, the noisy ruddy hawk rises in soaring circles over its territory, calling constantly, then sideslips and dives steeply on folded wings to its starting spot, pulls up and repeats: The aerial nuptials of the extremely vocal red-shouldered hawk has begun. So suggestively appealing is the display, neighboring pairs often join the procession. Courtship concluded, the woodland hawk builds or refurbishes its nest, most often found far from the forest edges, but near a water source. The bulky cup of twigs is usually constructed in the main crotch of a large tree and lined with leaves, lichen and other greenery - even the occasional cornstalk, piece of twine, and the woven nests of small songbirds. The cheery egg basket welcomes a clutch of three to four bluish-white, brown-blotched eggs, which are then incubated by both parents for about 33 days. The naked young hatch at different times and vary in size, and fledge some 45 days later. Listen for the parental pair exchanging "kip" calls while feeding the nestlings.

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