



HARRIS HAWK

Accipitriformes
Family: Accipitridae
Genus: *Parabuteo*
Species: *unicinctus*



Range: Southwestern United States through Central America south to Chile and central Argentina

Habitat: Semi-arid open habitats. Sparse woodland and semi-desert, as well as marshes

Niche: Carnivore, diurnal, arboreal

Wild diet: birds, lizards, mammals and large insects

Zoo diet: mice, chicks, rabbits and rats

Life Span: (Wild) 14 years
(Captivity)

Sexual dimorphism: Females 40% larger than males

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo, Hawk Hill at the Koret Animal Resource Center

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

Harris hawks are large hawks with a long tail and broad wings. They have dark brown plumage with chestnut shoulders, wing linings, and thighs, white on the base a tip of the tail, long, yellow legs and a yellow cere. The juveniles are mostly streaked with buff, and appear much lighter than the dark adults. When in flight, the undersides of their wings are buff-colored with brown streaking. Harris hawks do not migrate. They are rapid flying birds who soar very rarely.

Weight: M 25 oz F 36 oz
Length: 18 – 30 in
Wingspan: 3.5 - 4 ft

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Harris Hawks are not listed as threatened or endangered, nor are they included on the list of Wildlife of Special Concern. However, they are protected from harassment and illegal shooting by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Wild Harris Hawk populations are declining due to habitat loss; however, under some circumstances, Harris Hawks have been known to move into developed areas. The San Francisco Zoo helped release 25 Harris hawks, born in a breeding program at the zoo, near the Colorado River Basin.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Harris Hawks are generally a quiet species but will make a prolonged harsh "irrr" sound when nest is disturbed. Harris hawks are very territorial with their territory size depending on the availability of food and other resources.

Harris Hawks are social birds and will hunt in cooperative groups of two to six. All members of the group help with obtaining food, defending the breeding territory, and providing nest protection. This is believed to be an adaptation to the desert climate in which they live. Cooperatively hunting groups are more successful at capturing prey than individuals hunting alone and are able to depend on much larger prey when hunting in groups. This aspect of group hunting and food sharing increases survival rates for birds as individuals.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

Harris hawks have a strict dominance hierarchy within groups. The breeding, or alpha, female, is dominant to all other hawks in the group. Occasionally there is a second female who is subordinate to the alpha female but dominant to all other males in the group. Groups most commonly consist of two males and a female; both males help with obtaining food and feeding the nestlings and provide nest protection. Both the female and the male contribute to parental care. The alpha male is most likely to strike the predator as the female stays behind to protect the nest. Finally, there may be several gamma birds, which are subordinate to the alpha and beta individuals. These gamma birds may be either male or female, and usually they are sexually immature individuals. Often they are the juvenile offspring of the alpha pair. This establishment of helpers greatly increases the detection of predators and nest success.

A harris hawk nest is built mainly by the female in small trees, shrubby growth, or cacti. The nests are often compact, made of sticks, plant roots, and stems, and lined with leaves, moss, bark and plant roots. There are usually two to four eggs, which are incubated mostly by the female and hatch in 31 to 36 days and the chicks fledge at 45 to 50 days. Young stay near the nest for 3 to 4 months after fledging. The female sometimes breeds two or three times in a year. Young will stay with the family unit up to 3 years and help raise subsequent broods before dispersing from their natal territory.

Incubation: 31 - 36 days	Sexual Maturity:
# of Eggs: 2 - 4	Fledging: 45 - 50 days

MISCELLANEOUS

The name is derived from the Greek *para*, meaning beside, near or like, and the Latin *buteo*, referring to a kind of buzzard; *uni* meaning once; and *cinctus* meaning girdled, referring to the white band at the tip of the tail. Harris Hawks are popular birds used in the sport of falconry because of their group hunting style.

Sources:

Handbook of Birds of the World Vol 2 © 1994 Lynx Edicions
<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/>
<http://www.peregrinefund.org/>
<http://www.raptorcenter.org/>

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