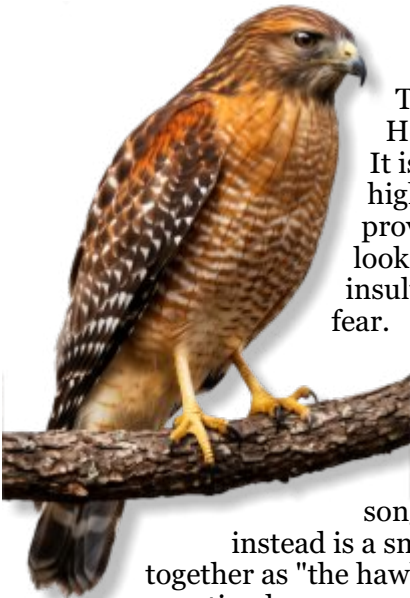


BIRD BREAK

Ah, those early mornings on the lanai, the silence broken by the odd frog, a NAS JAX flyover, a too-early leaf blower, and *those birds!* Hard to ignore, with over 520 recorded species in our neck of the woods, including year-round residents, wintering migrants, and seasonal visitors. And those early-rising vocal few who take up the stage in the trees and bushes of our backyards. And ring in the day. As we plan our attack on the daylight hours with a cup of coffee and open ears. Songs are longer, musical melodies used primarily to attract mates and defend territory. Calls are short, simple sounds used for everyday communication like warning of danger, locating a flock, or begging for food. You might not know that the call and song that have greeted you from above all this time are from the same bird!



The **Red-shouldered Hawk** does not arrive. It's call is so distinct that Hollywood has assigned it to the sound every eagle makes upon entering a scene. It is the bird world's most theatrical middle manager, surveying the yard from on high with the expression of someone who owns the place and has the paperwork to prove it. The rusty barred chest suggests it dressed for a Renaissance fair and never looked back. Blue Jays famously imitate its call, which the hawk finds professionally insulting. It eats squirrels whole and feels nothing. Maintain eye contact. Show no fear.

Song and Call:

Red-tailed hawks don't really have a "song" in the technical sense that songbirds do: they're raptors, not passerines ('perching' or 'songbirds'), so they lack the specialized vocal apparatus (the syrinx complexity) that lets songbirds produce those varied, musical, learned phrases. What a red-tail has instead is a small repertoire of calls, each tied to context, and people sometimes lump them together as "the hawk's song" when really they're all functionally calls. It has two distinct calls, one a repeating hoarse, rasping, descending '**KREEEeeerr**' that drops in pitch toward the end, the other a screaming '**KEE-aah KEE-aah KEE-aah**' that sounds like a nature documentary has suddenly become personal.

The **Eastern Bluebird** sings like someone who has genuinely processed their feelings and arrived at peace, a soft, warbling so relentlessly wholesome it makes you question your life choices. It is the bird world's most sincere optimist, which is suspicious. That improbable blue, the color of a sky that only exists in children's illustrations, seems factory-installed to make you feel you haven't been outside enough. It perches on fence posts gazing into the middle distance with the quiet confidence of someone who meditates successfully. To have a mating pair settle in your yard (provided you supply the proper domicile, which yes, is possible at [Magnolia Point](#)) is considered the near-impossible pinnacle of animal husbandry! Bluebird numbers collapsed for decades, then recovered, thanks to efforts by folks like Magnolia's Melanie Dean, and others. This cheeky little songbird processed that too, apparently, and decided it's fine after all. It's all fine.



Song and Call: The most notable song is a '**Churle-churl-lee, Churle-churl-lee**'. When calling, it's a soft, downslurred '**Tu-a-wee**' or '**Pew**' though with a chattering or scolding note when alarmed. It's more subdued and liquid-sounding, almost like the bird is singing under its breath. Males sing most from a perch near the nest cavity, especially at dawn, to attract a mate and defend territory. It's a relatively simple, repetitive song compared to virtuosic singers like mockingbirds or wrens; bluebirds aren't big mimics or improvisers, and would pretty much suck at karaoke at Saloon 17.

So, then, the contrast with the hawk is basically this: the bluebird's song is the musical, structured vocalization tied to courtship and territory, sung mostly by the male in breeding season, while its calls are the shorter, simpler, everyday notes both sexes use for contact and alarm, a true song/call split, rather than the single-repertoire-of-calls situation you get with a raptor like the red-tail.

*Full disclosure: my thanks to Cornell Ornithology Lab for their brilliant '**Merlin Bird ID**' app, which uses your phone to identify the birds in your backyard by their calls! You gotta try this! The rest I noodled up on my own. You know, before coffee when I have some sense!*

EDITOR