

WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK

Florida's most numerous hawk is also its most vocal. The "kee-yar, kee-yar" scream of the red-shouldered hawk is often heard as this raptor soars gracefully overhead or perches on the limb of a live oak. It is a medium-sized hawk, with a length of about 2 feet and a wingspan of 3 1/2 feet. A close look at this bird with binoculars reveals its beautiful colors and pattern: reddish-orange, barred underparts, a black and white banded tail (best seen in flight), a dark and white checkered back, and the reddish shoulders. In flight, pale crescents ("windows") near the wingtips are also visible.

The preferred habitats of this hawk are woodlands near water, especially cypress swamps and river forests. In these areas it hunts

for frogs, snakes, small mammals, and large insects. In late winter and spring, a large nest of sticks is constructed in a tree, where both parents rear their young. The red-shouldered hawk is a year-round resident of Florida, and its numbers here (just like our human population) are augmented in autumn by northern migrants that come here to spend the winter.