

Audio Transcript: Fort Sheridan Hawk's Nest podcast

Wait. What's that?

[music]

Down in the tall savanna grasses there's some movement... movement that's so slight that you would never notice it. But you don't have the eyesight of a red-tailed hawk.

As the raptor rides an updraft from Lake Michigan, it circles and with eyesight eight times stronger than humans, it stays focused on the movement. The movement is a deer mouse — a perfect meal to take back to the nest. The meal, er, mouse has no idea what's circling overhead, what's readying itself to swoop down and snatch the mouse in its talons.

[bird call]

Suddenly the red-tailed hawk is hurtling toward the mouse at more than 100 miles per hour, and in a matter of seconds the mouse is on its way to the bird's nest, hidden in a tree at Fort Sheridan.

Did you know that a red-tailed hawk could fly that fast? Did you know that its eyesight is eight times stronger than a human's?! Did you even realize that a red-tailed hawk is a bird of prey — that it eats other animals such as mice?

The red-tailed hawk is one of the best-known hawks. That's probably because its habitat spans an area that's larger than the habitat of any other hawk in North America. Of course, that habitat area includes Fort Sheridan! If you look closely, up in the trees, you can see their nests made of roots, grasses, bark, and evergreen sprigs.

Or look for them in the air, circling to spot their next meal. They may be a blur in the sky, but you're not a blur to them. Red-tailed hawks can see great distances in front of them; their eyes are like built-in binoculars. Their eyes can also work independently to look to the sides and see what goes on peripherally.

[music]

If you could see a red-tailed hawk up close, you'd see that it has many characteristics of a raptor. It has sharp talons, a hooked beak, and an impressive wingspan that allows it to swiftly reach its prey. These characteristics are similar to the other birds of prey at Fort Sheridan, such as owls, ospreys, and even bald eagles!

Birds of prey don't completely rule the roost at Fort Sheridan. There are a number of other birds. Some, like the crow, cardinal, downy woodpecker, and black-capped chickadees are here year-round. Others come only in the spring. In fact, the fort is located along one of the busiest migration corridors in the nation. The corridor is used by many other bird species, such as warblers, tanagers, terns, and red-headed woodpeckers that stop by the Lake Michigan shoreline on their way North. And, of course, there are shoreline birds, too. Willets, sandpipers, dunlins, greater and lesser yellow legs, and killdeer can all be seen wading in the surf.

But none of *those* birds has a giant replica of its nest at Fort Sheridan, like the red-tailed hawk does. This one's not actually up in a tree but on the ground. (Some people are happy to hear that, while others might be a little bummed out!) It's located at the edge of a ravine overlooking a

savanna. And it's literally the biggest red-tailed hawk's nest in the world! An entire classroom can fit inside.

In the nest, you'll find a lot of information on red-tailed hawks. And you can also see what it's like to have their vision (with the help of some serious magnification!) You can even look across the savanna or into the ravine to try to spot some potential meals that have been placed out there. Okay, they're plastic replicas, but it's still pretty cool to imagine you're a red-tailed hawk.