

THIS WEEK ON THE LLANO ESTACADO

January 18-22,2020



Figuring out what an animal is doing is great fun! Is this behavior instinctual or learned? Is it demonstrating a learned adaptation, or a physiological adaptation? Midland Montessori teacher Leslie Harman photographed this red-tailed hawk in a very peculiar pose. What do you think it is doing? (It is a red-tailed hawk because you can see its “belly-band” of dark streaks.) Red-tailed hawks are common winter residents on the southern Llano Estacado. The easiest place to see them is at the Midland Airpark, where one or more are often sitting on the fence posts near the prairie-dog “town.” They also sometimes join the prairie falcons and Cooper’s hawks that hunt the pigeons on the high-rise buildings in downtown Midland.

The hawk is carefully cleaning its talons after enjoying a meal of jackrabbit. The behavior might be a learned behavior, for it is possible there are “slob” hawks with a poor sense of hygiene, but more than likely it is instinctual. The long talons and curved beak (for better tearing of meat) is a physiological adaptation. The fact that it is a winter resident here in Midland County is a learned adaptation, for where individual hawks go in winter is a choice. They have to learn where the most productive hunting grounds are located, but the migration is instinctual behavior.

TEACHER AND STUDENT CHALLENGE; Red-tailed hawks have several hunting techniques — one of which is larceny. Research on the web to find out from who they steal!