

Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area



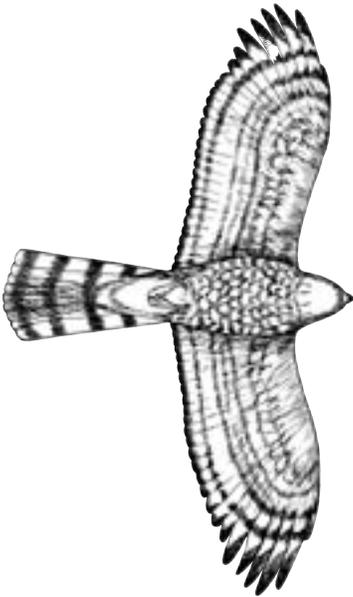
Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)

Description/Size

Wing span: 27 - 35 inches

Length: 15 -18 inches

Weight: 12 - 19 ounces.



Medium sized accipiter with relatively large head; holds wings straight when soaring. Dark gray above with cinnamon chest and belly barred with fine lines of white. Dark crown contrasts with pale nape and blue gray dorsal area. Short rounded wings are strongly barred. Long round-tipped tail has four dark bands and white terminal band. Vent is white. Beak is blackish at tip, bluish at base. Cere, legs and feet yellow. Talons black. Eyes are yellow in juveniles shifting progressively to orange and finally red in adults. Females are about one third larger than males. Sexes similar in plumage, but males, on average, more brightly colored than females. Juveniles are brown above and vertically streaked with brown and white on chest and belly; their wings and tails are barred. Bill gray with pale yellow cere. No color morphs or subspecies.

Similar Species

Sharp-shinned hawk juvenile– smaller; small and narrow head, wings that jut forward at the wrist; square tipped tail with thin white terminal band.

Northern Goshawk juvenile – larger; less rounded tail; bars on the tail feathers are offset creating a zigzag effect; undertail coverts streaked.

Habitat/Range

Deciduous, mixed, and coniferous forests and deciduous stands of riparian habitat in North and Central America. Occurs in a wide variety of habitats including rural and well treed urban areas. Breeds throughout southern Canada, US, and northern Mexico.

Tolerant of human disturbance and habitat fragmentation and breeds in suburban and urban settings. Urban sites have included isolated trees in residential neighborhoods. Forest edge habitat generally included within home range of breeding birds and may serve as primary hunting sites. Most birds winter within U.S. and most of Mexico. Hawks in the northern part of their range will migrate as far south as Central America; casually to Costa Rica and possibly Panama.

Food/Diet

Mainly small to medium sized birds and mammals like jays, robins, woodpeckers, small owls, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and other rodents. Prey preference varies regionally. Also eats reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Insects include grasshoppers, butterflies, and crickets. Will readily take domestic fowl – chickens, quail, and pigeons. Will cache uneaten prey on horizontal branches during the breeding season.



Voice

Usually silent except during breeding season. Mates likely communicate mainly by calling because of the poor visibility in their woodland habitats. Alarm call, *cak cak cak*, is most often heard. Males give a *kik* when returning to nest with food. Females give *kik* call when trying to locate the male. Females give *whaaa* call during food exchanges. Vocalizations may be an essential element of the pair bond.



Behavior

Wingbeats are described as stiff and choppy. Several rapid wingbeats alternate with brief glides in usual flight. Short powerful wings and long tail allow for speed and maneuverability in dense cover. Usually flies close to ground or below tree canopy when hunting or approaching and departing nest. Cooper's hawks are sit-and-wait predators that perch in concealed place, then dash out quickly to capture prey. When hunting ground prey, flies low, alternating rapid wingbeats and glides, through open forest using brush and trees to conceal its approach. Also soars high, and then stoops on flying prey. When attacking prey, flies rapidly, then glides last 12-15 feet before impact. Grasps prey with talons,

usually killing the prey on impact or grasping and relaxing grip on prey repeatedly until the prey is dead. Will also drown prey in water, holding it under until it ceases to move. Occasionally runs or walks on ground to pursue or retrieve prey. Prey is carried to a perch where it is plucked and torn into pieces. Cooper's hawks are solitary migrants. Avoids the Great Plains region due to little forest cover. Cooper's hawks said to be reluctant to cross water barriers. Birds from northern third or half of breeding range allegedly more migratory than those farther south. Birds from e. North America winter mostly in central and s. U.S.; those in the west winter in central and s. Mexico. Some populations are resident. Mobbed by smaller birds, especially when carrying prey.

Reproduction/Nesting

Clutch size: 3-5 eggs
Eggs: elliptical, bluish white, 1.9 x 1.5 inches,
Incubation: 34-36 days
Fledge: 27-34 days
Disperse: 7 weeks

Courtship behavior not well described. Males try to attract females by soaring in broad circles over treetops with tail closed, undertail coverts flared, and wings held high above back. Pairs soar together on thermals. Slow speed display flights occur where both birds fly slowly with exaggerated wingbeats interspersed with glides. Nests usually built in extensive stand of forest or woodlots larger than 10 acres but occasionally in solitary trees. Nest site often within half mile of water. Nests are bulky platforms of sticks with a "cup" lined with bark flakes; placed in a main crotch or on a limb next to the trunk and are usually 26-49 feet above ground. Nests are usually partially concealed by foliage. Many are built on top of old squirrel nests, hawk nests or in mistletoe clumps. Males show strong attachment to traditional nesting territories. Individuals occasionally use the same nest in successive or intermittent years, but typically build a new nest in the same area. Monogamous. Some pairs known to remate and some individuals to have new mates in subsequent years. Apparently solitary outside breeding season. Pairs often renest if initial clutch lost in early incubation or before. Adults react to potential predators near nest. Intensity of response to human intrusion varies, but rarely strike humans. Many breeding birds are inconspicuous, neither vocalizing nor behaving aggressively in the presence of humans, instead leaving the immediate vicinity of the

nest. Some females breed as yearlings, but males do not breed until two years old.

Life Span

Longest recorded – 13 years 10 months.

Conservation Status

Not on the US Fish and Wildlife's Endangered or Threatened Species List. However it is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Idaho Fish & Game lists the cooper's hawk as a protected non game species for which it is illegal to collect, harm or otherwise remove from its natural habitat. Western populations appear stable but eastern populations declined significantly in the mid-1900s, probably due to shooting, trapping, and pesticide contamination. Although Cooper's Hawks are still designated as Species of Special Concern, Threatened or Endangered in numerous eastern states, recent evidence suggests that breeding populations have recovered in many areas. DDT and its derivative DDE caused problems in the past with eggshell thinning and breakage. A few recent cases of organophosphate poisoning reported but effects on populations unclear, as are consequences of pesticide use in Mexico for western birds wintering there. Contaminants other than DDE (dieldrin, PCBs, mercury and other heavy metals) also present in eggs, but with unknown effects. Timber harvests may alter suitability of nesting or foraging habitats as well as prey populations on local or regional scales. In Arizona, reproductive success lower in heavily grazed than in lightly grazed riparian habitats; correlation with avian prey populations suggested. Populations likely more dependant on food supplies than availability of suitable nesting sites. Illegal shooting a minor problem.

Viewing in the NCA

The cooper's hawk winters in the NCA from November through February. It migrates through the NCA from August to October and from February through May.

Interesting Facts

Spanish name:
Ésmerejón de Cooper

- The scientific name comes from the Latin word *accipere* meaning to take or to grasp and refers to a bird of prey, and the Latinized last name of William Cooper, a noted 19th century ornithologist. The name translates into Cooper's bird of prey.
- Other names: chicken hawk, big blue darter, quail hawk.
- Will stake out suburban yards where it can pick off songbirds attracted to feeders.

Sources

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Illustration: courtesy Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Map: The Peregrine Fund
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