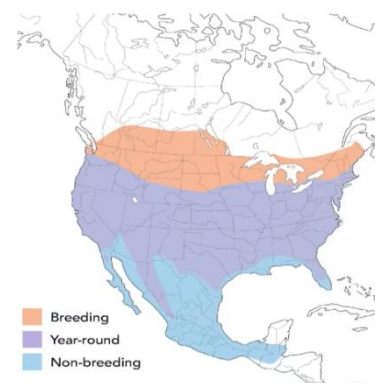


Cooper's Hawk



Classification
Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Aves
Order: Accipitriformes
Family: Accipitridae
Genus: *Accipiter*
Species: *cooperii*



Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** The Americas from southern Canada to Mexico but can be found as far south as Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Columbia, and Costa Rica.
- **Habitat:** Mixed forests, including deep forests and leafy subdivisions. They are also common in urban and suburban areas.
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern with numbers increasing.

Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 14 to 19 inches (35-48 cm)
- **Wingspan:** ~ 3 feet (100 cm)
- **Weight:** 0.5 to 1.3 pounds (226-595 g)
- **Lifespan:** Oldest individual recorded in the wild was at least 20 years old.
- **Identifying Traits:** Medium-sized hawk with short broad, rounded wings and a very long, gray and black barred rounded tail. The outermost tail feathers are shorter than the rest. Thick, dark bands on the tail. The chest has reddish barring. The back is brown-gray while the nape/neck is gray, which contrasts with the dark head giving a capped appearance. Feet and toes are yellow. Adults have red eyes while juveniles have yellow eyes.

Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Primarily eat birds, including quail, doves, and woodpeckers. May also eat bats, squirrels, and mice as well as frogs and snakes on occasion.
- **Breeding:** Slow wingbeats followed by gliding with wings held in a v shape are used for courting. Males make a bowing display to females after pairing.
- **Nesting:** Typically, 25 to 50 feet high off the ground in a crotch or on a horizontal branch around 2/3rds of the way up the tree. Use pines, oaks,

spruces, beeches, Douglas-firs and other tree species. Males generally build the nest with minimal help from the female. Use piles of sticks lined with bark flakes and green twigs. Lay 2 to 6 pale blue to bluish white eggs that take 30 to 36 days to incubate.

- **Migration:** Short to medium distance. Winter over most of the continental United States. Migrate as far south as southern Mexico and Honduras. In the fall, the females migrate south before the males and in the spring, the males migrate north before the females. When flying it displays a flap-flap-glide flying pattern (classic accipiter shape and pattern).
- **Call:** Typically, silent outside of breeding season. A grating “cak-cak-cak” that lasts 2 to 5 seconds is the most heard call in defense of the nest.

Fun Facts!

- A Cooper’s Hawk in one day can eat an amount of food equal to 12% of its body weight. Imagine a person that weighs 120 pounds eating 14 pounds of food or 4 to 5 large pizzas in one day!
- Cooper’s Hawks are known to be tricky to identify as they look very similar to the smaller Sharp-shinned Hawk. They have similar coloration, but the Cooper’s Hawk has a more rounded tail.
- Cooper’s Hawks from Western North America weigh around 1/5th less than the same species in the East.
- Cooper’s Hawks kill their prey by using their feet and repeatedly squeezing. They will hold the prey item away from their body until it is dead. They have also been known to hold a prey item under water and drown it until it has stopped moving.

Importance

Cooper’s Hawks help regulate small mammal and bird populations that may be considered pests to farmers and residential communities. They help contribute to a healthy ecosystem by regulating all of their prey species.

Threats and Conservation measures

Conservation status is of least concern. While numbers are increasing, Cooper’s Hawks face several threats, including habitat loss (deforestation), lack of prey availability (decline in bird populations), electrocution and collision hazards. Collision with human-made objects, such as windows and cars, accounts for fatalities in urban areas. To prevent car collisions, ask visitors to refrain from throwing food out car windows as this attracts prey such as rodents to the side of the road (<https://carolinaraptorcenter.org/raptor-hospital/>). Also, organizations like American Bird Conservancy, Audubon, and the U.S. Fish and



Wildlife Service work with builders and property owners to reduce bird–building collisions by promoting “Lights Out” programs, bird-friendly design standards (such as fritted glass), and practical guidelines for both new construction and retrofits. To address backyard bird decline, visitors can convert their yard into a bird-friendly habitat by providing water (bird bath), shelter (bird boxes) and habitat (native plants).

Sources

- <https://peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/hawks/coopers-hawk>
- https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Coopers_Hawk/overview
- https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Accipiter_cooperii/
- Davis, J., Conservation Education at Hawks Aloft. *Hawks Aloft*, 24(1), p.13.
- Dinets, V., 2025. Street smarts: a remarkable adaptation in a city-wintering raptor. *Frontiers in Ethology*, 4, p.1539103.
- Eccleston, D.T. and Harness, R.E., 2018. Raptor electrocutions and power line collisions. In *Birds of Prey: Biology and conservation in the XXI century* (pp. 273-302). Cham: Springer International Publishing
- McClure, C.J. and Rolek, B.W., 2020. Relative conservation status of bird orders with special attention to raptors. *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution*, 8, p.593941.
- Washburn, B.E., 2018. Human-raptor conflicts in urban settings. In *Urban raptors: ecology and conservation of birds of prey in cities* (pp. 214-228). Washington, DC: Island Press/Center for Resource Economics.