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NORTHWEST WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY

Northern Goshawk

Accipiter gentilis



By Aurora Hicks Beach

The northern goshawk, is the largest member of the Accipiters or true hawks. There are 47 other species of Accipiters throughout the world with Cooper's hawk and sharp-shinned hawks being the other species found in North America. The sub species *Accipiter gentilis laingi* is found in Canada.

Characteristics

The northern goshawk is a large hawk species. Its short, robust wings allow for rapid acceleration and the long tail allows for high manoeuvrability. The adult plumage is a dark brown to dark grey above, with a black cap and a signature white stripe above the eyes. The eyes are a bold reddish-orange colour. Female are normally larger than the male darker upper parts and bolder markings in the breast. The juveniles are brown on top, the breast has heavy streaking with a pale or white base.

There are 8 subspecies of goshawk that are separated by size, plumage, colouration and patterning.

Life Cycle

The northern goshawk will remain with the same mate year after year. The pair will perform a sky dance as courtship. The male will fly above and dive at the female or chase her through the canopy. The Pair can be seen to be flying together over the canopy, when they are easily spotted. The nest sites of the

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breeding pairs are usually at least 1 km (0.6 miles) apart and high up in a tree. The female will lay a clutch of between 1-5 eggs between April and early May. The female incubates the eggs for 35-38 days and the male hunts and returns regularly with food for the female. The eggs hatch after 34-41 days and the male continues to hunt for the brood whilst the female defends the nest. The young become independent after 70-90 days. Sexual maturity is reached after 2/3 years and this species has been known to live for at least 19 years.

Habitat

Goshawks hunt and nest in the forests, usually near a clearing in the wood and by a source of water, such as a lake, creek or pond. They can be found at sea level or as far up as alpine settings. The preferred forests are old growth, mature forests with 60% closed canopy.

The goshawk can be found throughout North America from central Alaska, in the woodlands and across to the Atlantic and south to Mexico. The goshawk doesn't migrate except those in the far north where the winters become too cold, then they migrate further down.

Behaviour

The northern goshawk diet has a wider range than other accipiter species. It eats mammals such as the snowshoe hare, squirrels and rabbits, birds like corvids and smaller songbirds, insects, reptiles and even carrion.

The northern goshawk hunts by watching the prey from a well-concealed location and once it spot its prey, it swoops down, talons first and kills its prey with a kneading motion. If the prey escapes the first attempt, the goshawk will meander through the forest chasing it prey even into water if necessary.

Threats

The sub-species *laingi* found in Canada is threatened due to human encroachment, habitat loss and insecticides. The species is least vulnerable on the IUCN list.

Although the goshawk is top of the food chain, both the great horned owl and black bear predate on the eggs.

The insecticides are affecting the goshawks because each songbird eats a many insects and accumulates a small amount of the insecticide. The goshawk then eats the songbirds that have a small amount of the insecticide and it builds up in the bird system, so much so, that it can affect reproduction.

What We Can Do To Help

- Preserve wetland habitats by not draining or filling in wetland.
- Leave fallen trees in wooded areas where they fall – a dead tree has more living organisms and wildlife in it than a live tree, and the ground needs the decaying material back to help nurture new trees.
- Avoid making sudden loud noises around nesting birds – this can scare them into abandoning their nests and the young birds in the nests will die.

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- Do not litter on land or in the water. Help clean up the environment – see <http://www.northwestwildlife.com/gcsc2004.php> for an article on the NWPS involvement in the “Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup” campaign.
- Dispose of toxic substances such as antifreeze, batteries, and paint responsibly. Municipalities usually provide special disposal facilities for these types of things, as putting them down drains can be extremely toxic.
- Reuse and recycle whenever possible.
- Buy organic food – this supports farmers who are trying to preserve the environment by not using chemical pesticides and herbicides.
- Plant native plant species in your garden. See <http://www.stanleyparkecology.ca/programs/public/ivyBusters.php> for background on the introduced species English Ivy killing trees in Stanley Park.
- Do not leave food or garbage outside in your backyard because it attracts bears and other wildlife. Realize that berries, fruits and vegetables growing in your backyard will attract animals.
- Do not feed wild animals. A wild animal can become dependent on humans for food and will become violent and attack humans when this food is not available. This is usually fatal to the animal because humans will kill an attacking animal.
- Volunteer to help organizations like the Northwest Wildlife Preservation Society.

Where & When to view the animal

Goshawks are notorious for being hard to find, however, at Maplewood Flats in North Vancouver a juvenile has been seen on a few occasions throughout the 2017 winter.

The most likely time to view the goshawk is during the mating season between February and March as the courtship displays are easily visible.

Bibliography

Web Resources:

Life history

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Goshawk/lifehistory

How to spot a goshawk

<http://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/northern-goshawk>

Photos of goshawks

<http://www.arkive.org/northern-goshawk/accipiter-gentilis/>

Details on goshawk in British Columbia

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https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/plants-animals-and-ecosystems/species-ecosystems-at-risk/brochures/northern_goshawk.pdf

Habitat of the accipiters

<http://www.hww.ca/en/wildlife/birds/sharp-shinned-hawk.html?referrer=https://www.google.ca/#top>

Detail on the northern goshawk in Canada

<http://www.registrelep-sararegistry.gc.ca/default.asp?lang=En&n=99FC419D-1>

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