

Cooper's Hawk

Scientific Name: *Accipiter cooperii*

Did You Know?

- Cooper's hawks belong to a family of hawks known as Accipiters (includes hawks with medium-sized, short winged, and long legged appearance). These hawks prey mostly on other birds.
- Their long tails act as rudders that allow them to be extremely maneuverable in wooded areas as they hunt birds on the wing.
- This raptor makes a long series of harsh and rapid kak, kak, kak, kaks.



- The outer tail feathers are shorter than the rest of the tail feathers, giving the tail a rounded appearance, which -- apart from size -- is the only way to distinguish this bird from the sharp-shinned hawk.
 - While many people know of the decline of the peregrine falcon due to pesticides, few are aware that the once-common Cooper's hawk has suffered a similar fate and is now gone from large areas of the eastern deciduous forest.
 - The eyes of this hawk, like most predatory birds, face forward, giving it good depth perception for hunting and catching prey while flying at high speeds.
- When hunting, the Cooper's hawk usually perches and watches for its prey. It waits until its quarry is looking away, then quickly swoops down and seizes it. Bobwhites, starlings, blackbirds, chipmunks and squirrels are common prey for this hunter.
 - When Cooper's hawks are observed in flight, the male raises his wings high above the back and flies in a wide arc with slow, rhythmic flapping somewhat like that of a nighthawk.
 - The Cooper's hawk can be a problem around poultry farms where they may occasionally capture unwary chickens. However, by preying on wild birds and rodents, they help keep populations of wild birds and rodents in check.
 - It was named by Charles Bonaparte in 1828 after William Cooper, who collected the specimens that were used to describe the species.
 - The Cooper's hawk is from 14 to 21 inches long, with a wingspan of from 27 to 36 inches.

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General Information On Cooper's Hawks

IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS:

Medium-sized hawk from 14 to 20 inches in length. The adults have a gray/blue back, the underside is white, horizontally streaked with rufous bars. The head has a black cap, and there are three black bands on the tail. Males and females look the same, but the female is about one-third larger than the male. The immature birds are brown above and vertically streaked with brown below. The adult's eye color is orange to red, while the immature has a yellow eye.

RANGE:

A North American species, Cooper's hawks breed from southern Canada to the southern part of the U.S. They are a migratory species.

HABITAT:

A forest-dwelling bird found in deciduous woodlands but also seen in urban areas. Not uncommon around farm woodlots.

NESTING:

Cooper's hawks build a stick nest high in the middle of a deciduous tree, usually in the crotch, where they lay two to five eggs. Cooper's hawks are known to return to the same area to nest year after year, although recent studies have shown that individual birds change mates and nest sites frequently in succeeding years.

FEEDING:

Known as a predator of birds, the Cooper's hawk also feeds on mammals, particularly squirrels and chipmunks. Once known as a regular denizen of poultry yards, it is one of many "chicken hawks."

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Populations of the Cooper's hawk were thought to be declining as early as the 1930s. This species has suffered greatly from persecution due to its poultry-eating habits. It has also suffered from habitat destruction.