

Bird Watch on the Palmer Divide

Northern goshawk: Accipiter gentilis



By Elizabeth Hacker

As Chinook winds blow winter away from the Palmer Divide, birds are establishing territories and some are already nesting. A few weeks ago, John Heiser emailed a photo of an accipiter he and his sweetie Francy spotted in their yard. He thought it might be a red-tailed hawk, but this bird had a long banded tail, yellow eyes, an eye ridge, and a light eyebrow, all the marks of a juvenile accipiter. Accipiters

Birds of prey have six major classifications including eagle, vulture, buteo, accipiter, falcon, and harrier. The red-tail hawk is a buteo. In Europe it is referred to as a buzzard because it eats carrion. Many birds of prey consume carrion, but the accipiters and falcons eat only fresh prey and are smaller than the buteos. Accipiters are fast and agile fliers but not as aerodynamic as a falcon.

Accipiters are forest-dwelling birds of prey distinguished by their long tails and lack of a procoracoid foramen, which allows them to bend their wings and bring them in close to their bodies. Their long slender bodies, short broad wings, and long tails allow them to effortlessly fly in the forests. There are three species of North American accipiter: the northern goshawk, the Cooper's hawk, and the sharp-shinned hawks.

Northern goshawk

Juvenile accipiters have similar coloring but vary in size. Due to its large size and eyebrows, I thought John's bird might be a northern goshawk but to be sure I forwarded the photo to naturalist Ken Pals and he confirmed it. Description

The goshawk is the largest of the accipiters and is a powerful and aggressive hunter. Adult goshawks exhibit regional color variation, but the ones I've observed on the Divide have slate gray feathers on their backs with light gray striped under parts. The top of their heads are black with distinctive white eyebrows set above an eye ridge. Their eyes are bright red.

One summer I observed a pair of adult northern goshawks east of Highway 83 perched on poles. I could see their red eyes and even though I was sitting in my car, those red eyes followed me as if daring me to get out.

Juvenile goshawks look like a different species. Their brown back is more similar to a red-tailed hawk. But their tails are long with brown bars and they have a light yellow eye, which is not at all like the red-tailed hawk. In the photo, I could see the eye ridge and the beginning of an eyebrow. Goshawks reach sexual maturity at the end of their second year. Due to its size, I assume John's goshawk was a second-year female.

Flight

The flight is typically a "flap, flap, glide" pattern. The

short, robust wings enable rapid acceleration up to 38 mph and its long tail provides excellent maneuverability, allowing it to fly between trees.

Hunting and diet

The northern goshawk hunts birds and mammals including crows, squirrels, mice, and rabbits but is capable of killing much larger prey such as geese. Its name comes from the Old English word "gos," meaning goose, and it was so named because it often preyed on geese.

It typically hunts from a concealed perch, moving often to avoid detection. It also flies along the forest edge or low over open fields looking for unsuspecting prey. Once prey is spotted, it aggressively pursues it. The goshawk may swoop down on it, crash into brush to grab it, or patiently wait for it to emerge from its hiding place and pounce on it.

The goshawk uses its strong legs and feet to grab its prey and then kills it by kneading its talons into it. It has a small curved beak that it uses to remove the fur and feathers from its prey and strip small pieces of flesh to swallow or feed to its young.

Breeding

The northern goshawk is a secretive, nonsocial bird except during mating season. In March, goshawks return to their nesting territories. The male performs an undulating flight and calls out in his gull-like voice to welcome a mate or attract a new one. Pairs form long-term bonds that last until death but may separate after the juveniles leave. They reunite the following spring and return to the same nesting territory. If a mate dies, the remaining bird is thought to search for a new partner.

In April, the female will lay two to five large tan eggs in a nest made of sticks located near the top of a tall tree. The female broods the eggs for about a month while the male aggressively guards the nest and brings her food. Chicks are hatched covered in down and completely dependent on their parents. Pin feathers begin to emerge in 10 days and the chicks will grow to the size of the adult



Above: Drawing by ELizabeth Hacker of an adult Northern Goshawk.

Right: Photo of a juvenile Northern Goshawk by John Heiser.

Color versions are posted at www.ocn.me/v12n4bird.htm.



within two months.

After fledgling the nest, juvenile goshawks remain in the adults' territory for about a year to hone their hunting skills. Parents no longer feed them, but they do share food to supplement their diet. After a year, the juveniles leave their parents' territory and establish one of their own.

Interesting facts

The northern goshawk was, and still is, used in falconry. Attila the Hun wore an image of a goshawk on his helmet to scare his enemies.

Goshawks move about within a large region, but they are not considered migratory birds.

I am one of the few who still write letters and enjoy using beautiful stamps. When the "Birds of Prey" collection was released in January, I was first in line. It is a set of five beautifully illustrated stamps that includes the northern goshawk. Email me a note with your name and address and I'll snail-mail you a reply with one of these stamps.

Elizabeth Hacker is a writer and artist. Email her at elizabethhacker@ocn.me to share bird pictures and stories.

Art Matters

A taste of art uncorked—the current U.S. art rage



By Janet Sellers

The art and wine night is a recent art world phenomenon that is catching on all around, and people are raving about it. The art walks and the wine tastings have met their new accomplice in that people are having a glass of wine with artist-teachers at hand and actually making a painting themselves to take home.

So it is more than an art class, in a sense, and more than a gallery show or wine-tasting as well. It is nice to have some libation and enjoy looking at paintings and sculptures, to be sure. The art openings and art walks and art hops we have here in our Tri-Lakes area enrich our lives, and we know we can look forward to them. So it is a

natural addition to make some art on an evening out.

Uncorked art night doesn't just mean wine and art. The idea is that we uncork our inner artist in enjoying the colors and materials with the guidance of a professional artist. From ladies night out to date night to fundraisers, retirement parties, and company team building, these forays into the art side of us are catching on and bubbling forth in a lot of ways.

Some venues offer wine, tea, or sodas and a light menu to choose from. Or, participants may bring their own beverage and food, and everything else is provided for the art experience, from paint and canvas to cups and

napkins and beyond. It's kind of a party with something to take home as a memento.

No experience is necessary for the participants. Most of the places around the country offer the "one size fits all" style of group painting of a single image, yet no two paintings end up alike. Each has the indelible brushstrokes and intent of the person working on the piece, and they send you home with a finished work of art to fill your

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