

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus



Length: 9-11 in. (male); 11-13 in. (female)
Weight: 3-4 oz. (male); 5-8 oz. (female)
Wingspan: 20-21 in. (male); 23-26 in. (female)

The small sharp-shinned hawk has the typical short round wings and long tail of the accipiters. It can be distinguished from the Cooper's hawk by its small size and the squared-off shape of the tip of its tail. Its eye is placed in the center of the rounded head. In flight the small head barely projects beyond the leading edge of the wings.

Flight: Typical flight pattern for accipiters: flap, flap, glide - flap, flap, glide.

Voice: Alarm notes "kik-kik-kik-kik." Male, 2 notes higher than female. Wailing keeeps.

Habitat: During breeding season - stays in forest canopy unless displaying. Cooper's hawks are seen in increasing numbers while Sharp-shins are declining due to habitat. Cooper's will nest in fragmented woodlands, while sharp-shinned won't.

Sharp-shinned hawks are found in woodlands throughout most of North and Central America, more northern than Cooper's hawks. Northern birds are migratory, with young

females, then males going before older females and males.

Seem to prefer coniferous tree located in groves of deciduous to nest in. They will return to nest locations, but they do not reuse old nests. Sharp-shins lay 2 to 6 eggs; the female is the primary incubator, while the male provides food. Incubation averages 30 to 35 days, and the young fledge in 21 to 27 days.

They will still-hunt from inconspicuous perches or fast darts through woodlands, flushing startled birds. Sharp-shins specialize in catching small birds, small mammals, lizards, frogs, and insects.



Sharp-shinned, left. Cooper's, right.

Here are some generally accepted id points

1 - Flight behavior. While flying high and in the open, the Sharp-shinned alternates flapping followed by a "drifty" glide. The wing beats are quick and flicking. The Cooper's wing beats are strong and stiff.

2 - Body shape. The Cooper's head and neck jut well forward of the wings. The Sharp-shinned's head and neck appear to be "pulled in" and its wrist joints are more obvious than those of the Cooper, and seem to be pressed more forward in the bird's soar.

3- Tail shape. The Sharpie's tail is more squared-off than the Cooper's, and the terminal band is more gray than white. The Cooper's tail, conversely, is a bit rounder at the white terminal band is more distinct. (This is most noticeable in the fall and can be worn off by spring)

Cool Facts

1. After the young leave the nest, the adults pass food to the young in mid-air. The parents give the prize to the first young hawk to reach them, hovering briefly and kicking the prey outward just as the fledgling arrives.
2. Sharp-shinned Hawks migrate south out of Canada in the fall and are observed at hawk watches in very large numbers. The hawks follow similar landscape features.
3. The habit of hunting around bird feeders has been suggested as an explanation for the decrease in numbers of Sharp-shinned Hawks seen at eastern hawk watches. Fewer hawks may be migrating south, preferring instead to stay farther north near a dependable food source: feeder birds.
4. Male Sharp-shinned Hawks average 57% of the body mass of females, the most sexually dimorphic of all North American raptors.
5. The Coopers Hawk derives its name from William C. Cooper, a New York scientist and father of James C. Cooper, for whom the Cooper Ornithological Society is named.

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