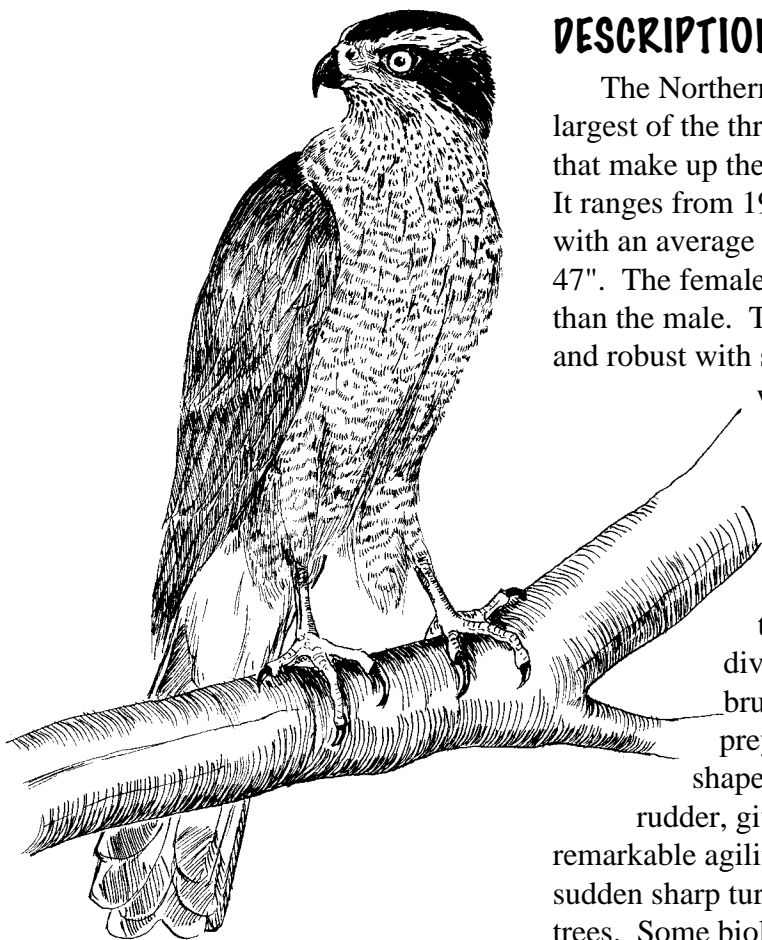




WILDLIFE NOTES

Northern goshawk

Accipiter gentilis



DESCRIPTION

The Northern Goshawk is the largest of the three forest hawks that make up the genus *Accipiter*. It ranges from 19-27" in length, with an average wingspan of 40-47". The female is slightly larger than the male. The body is broad and robust with short powerful

wings. A pronounced mass of white feathers above each eye may offer protection to the eyes as it dives into thick brush to ambush prey. A long wedge-shaped tail acts as a rudder, giving the Goshawk remarkable agility in making sudden sharp turns through the trees. Some biologists have nicknamed the Goshawk the "sports car of the bird world" when describing its maneuverability in the air. Even more impressive is the tenacity of this grand bird in pursuit of its prey. As its prey seeks cover in a dense thicket, the Goshawk often continues the chase on foot.

The adult Northern Goshawk has captivated humans for thousands of years with its grey, ghost-like appearance and pierc-

ing red to reddish-brown eyes. Adult colorings range from slate blue-gray to black on the head, back, and wings, and pale to white undersides barred with fine horizontal gray shading. The tail is light gray with three or four dark bands.

GEOGRAPHIC RANGE

The Northern Goshawk inhabits forested areas all around the northern hemisphere, including both North America and Eurasia. In North America there are three subspecies, *A.g. apache*, *A.g. atricapillus*, and *A.g. laingi*. New Mexico lies within the range of two of these subspecies, *A.g. apache* and *A.g. atricapillus*. The *A.g. apache* is found in the mountains of southern New Mexico and Arizona, and south of the border throughout the northern mountains of Mexico. The *A.g. atricapillus* exists throughout the northern region of North America and in the mountains and forests of the western states, with populations reaching south into both New Mexico and Arizona. The third subspecies in North America, *A.g. laingi*, also known as the Queen Charlotte Islands Goshawk, typically is found in coastal British Columbia and southeastern Alaska.

While many species of hawks are readily seen soaring and circling high above the landscape, the Northern Goshawk maintains an almost secretive presence in North American forests. The Goshawk is a woodland hawk, and if you are lucky, you can see this noble predator zipping through dense forest and along the forests edge in a spectacular pursuit of prey.

HABITAT

Northern Goshawks typically use a wide-reaching home range, sometimes up to 6000 acres, for hunting, nesting, and raising their young. They can live in a diversity of coniferous, deciduous, and mixed forests, as long as there are high concentrations of large, mature trees that offer medium to high canopy cover.

Goshawks hunt in and below the canopy. Though they are often considered bird-eating hawks, their diet is dependent upon their environment. They may consume a variety of prey, including birds, mammals, invertebrates, and reptiles.

Sizeable trees are crucial for a Goshawk's massive nest. A platform nests of sticks lined with foliage is built on a large horizontal limb near the trunk. A nest may become very big as a pair may reuse it, adding new material each year. The nest is usually built near a source of water and sometimes next to a small forest opening, such as a meadow or riparian area.

BEHAVIOR

Northern Goshawks are monogamous and are thought to mate for life. When courting or displaying over a nesting territory, Goshawks may perform impressive aerial displays or perch in the nesting area while vocalizing. They will fiercely defend their nests from intruders.

Goshawks produce two to four young each season. Once nestlings reach 35 to 42 days old, they move to branches near the nest. They promptly begin practice flights from branch to branch and may initiate a flight on their own

when they are 35 to 46 days old. Fledglings often take part in "play" behavior which is believed to give them practice in hunting and defense skills. Parents may continue to feed their young until they are about 70 days old.

MIGRATION AND RELOCATION

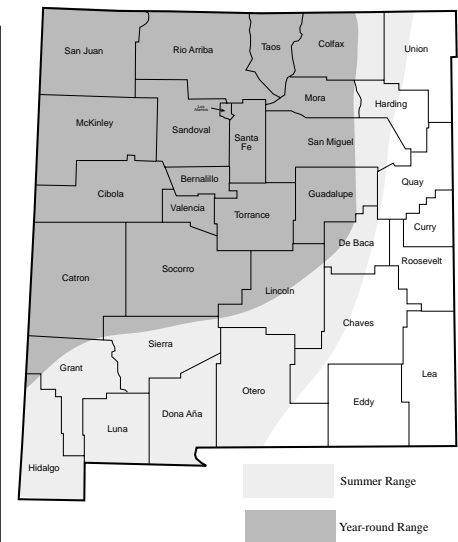
Goshawks from many populations will remain in their nesting areas throughout their lives, although those that breed in the north and northwestern parts of North America are migratory. Goshawks that breed in New Mexico may relocate to lower elevations during the cold winter months when prey is limited.

ECOSYSTEM ROLES

The Northern Goshawk plays an important role as a predator in the ecosystem in which it lives. Although it is rather high on the food chain, the Goshawk has several natural predators, such as Great Horned Owls, eagles, martens and wolves. The Goshawk depends on large stands of old growth forests. Because of this, it is considered an "indicator species". Changes in Goshawk populations can indicate changes or problems within the forest habitat.

CONSERVATION STATUS

Scientific studies have shown a decline in Goshawk populations throughout North American forests. Dramatic changes in mature and old growth forests have resulted in a loss of critical habitat for Goshawks. Improper timber harvesting, forest fragmentation from roads and develop-



ment, fire reduction, and livestock overgrazing may contribute to habitat loss. Factors which may add to the decline in Goshawk populations include human disturbance, poaching, drought, disease, toxic chemicals, and a reduced prey-base. In recent years, New Mexico has listed the Northern Goshawk as a Sensitive Species and has considered increasing conservation efforts to protect this grand hawk of the forest.

HAWK WATCHING

Perhaps the best opportunities to see a Northern Goshawk are during the spring and fall migrations. HawkWatch International surveys migrating raptors at two sites in New Mexico. The Sandia Mountains site is used during spring migration, while the Manzano Mountains site is used during fall migration. The public is welcome. For more information, contact HawkWatch International, (505) 255-7622.

If you are interested in obtaining additional copies, please send your request to:
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