

Sharp-shinned hawk *Accipiter striatus*



Photos by bill@schmoker.org

Physical Description:

In North America, the Sharp-shinned Hawk is the smallest of the forest accipiters. Accipiters have short, rounded wings and a long, banded tail, allowing them to maneuver easily through dense forest canopy in pursuit of agile, smaller prey.

Size: 25-36 cm (10-14 in) in length; 51-71 cm (20-28 in) wingspan.

Identification:

Adult "sharpies" have a gray back (bluish-gray in males, brownish-gray in females) and reddish, horizontally-barred breast and belly. Immatures have dark brown backs and cream-colored breast and bellies with dark vertical streaking. Eye color in all accipiters changes with age. As an immature bird, the eye color of the Sharp-shinned Hawk is yellow. The color gradually progresses to orange, and eventually becomes dark red, usually in older adults.

Field identification of Sharp-shinned Hawks can be difficult, as they resemble the somewhat larger Cooper's Hawk in relative size, color, and shape. However, in flight, sharpies have a less protruding head and a shorter tail with a squared formation at the end. Sharp-shins appear more buoyant but less stable in flight than other accipiters. Their wing beat is quick, deep strokes and a flapping motion at the "wrist."

Hunting Strategies:

The diet of the Sharp-shinned Hawk consists of birds, small mammals, and other small vertebrates. This species hunts its prey on the wing or from a perch in the forest. The Sharp-shinned Hawk is very agile and is able to chase its avian prey through the forest. Some Sharp-shinned Hawks are migratory.

Sharp-shinned Hawk usually flies below the canopy, steering with its tail. It has very agile flight, and it is able to fly through the Epervier brun forest, although it hurts its breast against branches. During migration, it uses alternately wing beats, glides and soaring.

Hunting Strategies:

Sharp-shinned Hawk feeds mainly on small birds, but it also consumes large insects, small mammals, lizards and frogs.

Habitat & Range:

During the breeding season, the Sharp-shinned Hawk is found in the extreme northern areas of the United States, most of Canada, and mountainous portions of the United States. Wintering birds can be found throughout most of the United States, and some birds winter as far south as Central America.

Sharpies migrate south between early September and the end of October. They return north in April and May. When migrating, Sharp-shinned Hawks follow mountain ridgelines more closely than most other raptors. These are the most common hawks observed along most western flyways. In the Goshute Mountains of Nevada, they account for 31 percent of the total number of raptors observed, and 57 percent of the total trapped and banded.

Reproduction:

Sharp-shinned Hawk builds its nest in dense trees, often below canopy. Both adults collect nesting materials, but female builds the platform nest.

Nest is made with fresh twigs and lined with bark chips. Nest is used year after year, and sometimes when nest becomes too old, adults build another nest above it. Nest is situated between 20 to 60 feet above the ground.

Female lays 4 to 5 white or bluish eggs, spotted with dark. Incubation lasts about 21 to 35 days, by female, often fed by the male while at nest.

Chicks hatch within Epervier brun one or two days of each other. They are altricial, and female broods them during 2 or 3 weeks. They fledge at about 21 to 32 days, males sooner than females. Young are fed by parents during about 25 days after fledging.

They reach their sexual maturity at two years.

This species produces one clutch per year.

Communication:

Sharp-shinned Hawk's call is a series of "kik-kik-kik" or "kek-kek-kek", but it is usually silent. Vocalizes occur during breeding season.

Near the nest, male utters "kip-kip" or "kew-kew-kew" and female replies "keeeep". Nestlings make "eee" at nest.