

California Wildlife Habitat Relationships System
California Department of Fish and Game
California Interagency Wildlife Task Group

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

Accipiter striatus

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE

Order: FALCONIFORMES

Class: AVES

B115

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Fairly common migrant and winter resident throughout California, except in areas with deep snow. Breeding distribution poorly documented. Very few breeding records for Cascades/Sierra Nevada. Probably breeds south in Coast Ranges to about 35° lat., and at scattered locations in the Transverse and Peninsular Ranges. May no longer breed in the southern Sierra Nevada. Uncommon winter migrant to Channel Islands. Uncommon permanent resident and breeder in mid-elevation habitats. Breeds in ponderosa pine, black oak, riparian deciduous, mixed conifer, and Jeffrey pine habitats. Prefers, but not restricted to, riparian habitats. North facing slopes, with plucking perches are critical requirements. All habitats except alpine, open prairie, and bare desert used in winter.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Eats mostly small birds, usually no larger than jays; also takes small mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians. Perches, and darts out in sudden flight to surprise prey; also cruises rapidly in search flights. Often hunts as a harrier, in low, gliding flights. Often forages in openings at edges of woodlands, hedgerows, brushy pastures, and shorelines, especially where migrating birds are found.

Cover: Roosts in intermediate to high-canopy forest. Nests in dense, even-aged, single-layered forest canopy. Winters in woodlands.

Reproduction: Usually nests in dense, pole and small-tree stands of conifers, which are cool, moist, well shaded, with little ground-cover, near water. Nest is a platform or cup in dense foliage against trunk, or in main crotch of tree, usually 2-24 m (6-80 ft) above ground. Most inconspicuous nest of the accipiters (Call 1978).

Water: Nest usually located within 90 m (275 ft) of water. Captive individuals drink (Brown and Amadon 1968).

Pattern: Uses dense stands in close proximity to open areas.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Some individuals migrate into California for winter. Others migrate to mountains for summer and downslope to foothills and valleys for winter.

Home Range: In Wyoming, Craighead and Craighead (1956) measured 2 breeding home ranges of 67 ha and 132 ha (166 and 326 ac). Reynolds (1979) reported crude home range of 2750 ha (6600 ac).

Territory: Appears to be same as home range. Distances averaged 4.1 km (2.5 mi) between nests. Very active nest defense.

Reproduction: Breeds April through August; peak late May to July. Clutch averages 4-5 eggs; range 3-8. Incubation 34-35 days, by both parents. Male brings food to female and semi-altricial young; fledging occurs at about 60 days. Among 11 pairs in Oregon, Reynolds (1975) reported 2.7 young/ pair, and a hatching success of 70%. Egg loss was greater than nestling loss. Nests may be reused in later years.

Niche: Fledging is timed to coincide with fledging of prey birds, providing a food supply for young, inexperienced hunters. An important predator of small birds. May compete with Cooper's hawk.

Comments: The least common breeding accipiter in California. Current breeding status in doubt; needs investigation.

REFERENCES

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B115

Life history accounts for species in the California Wildlife Habitat Relationships (CWHR) System were originally published in: Zeiner, D.C., W.F.Laudenslayer, Jr., K.E. Mayer, and M. White, eds. 1988-1990. California's Wildlife. Vol. I-III. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento, California. Updates are noted in accounts that have been added or edited since original publication.