

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

COOPER'S HAWK

Accipiter cooperii

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE
B116

Order: FALCONIFORMES

Class: AVES

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

A breeding resident throughout most of the wooded portion of the state. Breeds in southern Sierra Nevada foothills, New York Mts., Owens Valley, and other local areas in southern California. Ranges from sea level to above 2700 m (0-9000 ft). Dense stands of live oak, riparian deciduous, or other forest habitats near water used most frequently.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Catches small birds, especially young during nesting season, and small mammals; also takes reptiles and amphibians. Hunts in broken woodland and habitat edges; catches prey in air, on ground, and in vegetation. Often dashes suddenly from perch in dense cover and pursues prey in air through branches. Sometimes runs prey down in dense thickets. Uses cover to hide, attack, and approach prey; also soars and makes low, gliding search flights.

Cover: Seldom found in areas without dense tree stands, or patchy woodland habitat.

Reproduction: Nests in deciduous trees in crotches 3-23 m (10-80 ft), but usually 6-15 m (20-50 ft), above the ground. Also nests in conifers on horizontal branches, in the main crotch, often just below the lowest live limbs. Nest is a stick platform lined with bark. Usually nests in second-growth conifer stands, or in deciduous riparian areas, usually near streams.

Water: Nesting and foraging usually occur near open water or riparian vegetation. Wetting or drowning of prey has been described.

Pattern: Frequents landscapes where wooded areas occur in patches and groves (Beebe 1974). Often uses patchy woodlands and edges with snags for perching. Dense stands with moderate crown-depths used for nesting.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Mostly a yearlong resident. Some from more northern areas migrate into California; also moves downslope and south from areas of heavy snow in autumn and returns in spring.

Home Range: In Michigan, Craighead and Craighead (1956) measured 4 home ranges that averaged 311 ha (768 ac) and varied from 96-401 ha (237-992 ac); they estimated that 17 other home ranges averaged 207 ha (512 ac), and varied from 18-531 ha (45-1312 ac). They reported 1 home range in Wyoming of 205 ha (506 ac).

Territory: Males defend an area about 100 m (330 ft) around potential nest sites prior to pair formation (Brown and Amadon 1968). Nests in Oregon were 3.2 to 4.2 km (2 to 2.6 mi) apart (Jackman and Scott 1975). Elsewhere, nests have been reported 1.6 to 2.4 km (1 to 1.5 mi) apart (Meng 1951, Brown and Amadon 1968). Of 77 territories in California, in oak stands, mean distance between nests was 2.6 km (1.6 mi).

Reproduction: Breeds March through August; peak activity May through July. Single-brooded; clutch size 2-6, usually 4-5. Female incubates 35-65 days (Brown and Amadon 1968); male provides food during this period. Young altricial; yearly fledgling success is about 2 young/ pair (Craighead and Craighead 1956).

Niche: An important predator of small birds. Nestlings and immatures not yet skilled at catching prey may be killed by ravens, northern goshawks, and great horned owls (Beebe 1974). May compete, to a limited extent, with sharp-shinned hawks and northern goshawks.

Comments: Breeding numbers reduced in recent decades.

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