

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

NORTHERN GOSHAWK

Accipiter gentilis

Family: ACCIPITRIDAE

Order: FALCONIFORMES

Class: AVES

B117

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DISTRIBUTION, ABUNDANCE, AND SEASONALITY

Breeds in North Coast Ranges through Sierra Nevada, Klamath, Cascade, and Warner Mts., in Mt. Pinos and San Jacinto, San Bernardino, and White Mts. Remains yearlong in breeding areas as an uncommon resident. Prefers middle and higher elevations, and mature, dense conifer forests. Casual in winter along north coast, throughout foothills, and in northern deserts, where it may be found in pinyon-juniper and low-elevation riparian habitats.

SPECIFIC HABITAT REQUIREMENTS

Feeding: Hunts in wooded areas. Uses snags and dead-topped trees for observation and prey-plucking perches. Feeds mostly on birds, from robin to grouse in size. Small mammals, of squirrel and rabbit size, often taken. Rarely eats carrion and insects. Prey caught in air, on ground, or in vegetation, using fast, searching flight, or rapid dash from a perch.

Cover: Uses mature and old-growth stands of conifer and deciduous habitats.

Reproduction: Usually nests on north slopes, near water, in densest parts of stands, but close to openings (Jackman and Scott 1975). In eastern Oregon, nest usually was located in fork of large, horizontal limb close to trunk, at bottom of live canopy 6-24 m (19-82 ft) above ground. Used large, live trees with mean dbh of 27.4 cm (11 in) (Reynolds et al. 1982). Uses old nests, and maintains alternate sites.

Water: Usually is a water source within territory. Young have been reported bathing (Bond 1942, Brown and Amadon 1968).

Pattern: Dense, mature conifer and deciduous forest, interspersed with meadows, other openings, and riparian areas required. Nesting habitat includes north-facing slopes near water.

SPECIES LIFE HISTORY

Activity Patterns: Yearlong, diurnal activity.

Seasonal Movements/Migration: Some movement downslope after breeding season, as far as valley foothill hardwood habitat in Sierra Nevada. Migration into lowlands occurs irregularly; probably related to availability of food rather than weather (Mallette and Gould 1978).

Home Range: Home range appears to be same as territory.

Territory: Extremely defensive of nest area. Vociferous; will strike intruders, including humans. Territory estimated to be 1.6 to 39 km² (0.6 to 15 mi²) (Brown and Amadon 1968). Averaged 2.1 km² (0.8 mi²) in Wyoming (Craighead and Craighead 1956). Distances of 2.9 to 5.6 km (1.8 to 3.5 mi) have been reported between nesting pairs.

Reproduction: Begins breeding in April in southern California, and by mid-June in the north. Female lays eggs in 3-day intervals for average clutch of 3 (range 1-5). Female incubates 36-41 days while male provides food. After hatching, female feeds brood 8-10 days, then male helps feed them. Young may leave nest to perch at about 40 days; usually fledge by 45 days. Young begin to hunt by 50 days, and often independent by 70 days.

Niche: Great horned owls, ravens, and crows may prey on young goshawks. May be limited competition for food with other accipiters.

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