

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

Animal Abstract

Element Code: ABNKC12061

Data Sensitivity: Yes

CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE

NAME: *Astur atricapillus* (Linnaeus)

COMMON NAME: American Goshawk

SYNONYMS: *Accipiter atricapillus* (Linnaeus)

Accipiter gentilis atricapillus (A. Wilson, 1812)

Accipiter atricapillus atricapillus (A. Wilson, 1812)

Falco atricapillus Wilson, 1812

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Northern Goshawk

FAMILY: Accipitridae

AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION: Sangster, George. 2022. Vertebrate Zoology 72:445-456.

TYPE LOCALITY: *Falco gentilis*: “in Alpibus = Dalecarlian Alps, Sweden.”

U.S. subspecies *A. g. atricapillus*: “within a few miles of Philadelphia [Pennsylvania].”

TYPE SPECIMEN: Type of *A.g. atricapillus*: USNM A08508 (Adult male). G. Suckley, -- -- 18--. Fort Steilacoom, Pierce Co., Washington, in Bair, Brewer, and Ridgway, Hist. of N. Amer. Birds (Land Birds) 3: 238, 240, January 1874.

TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS: Two North American species in the genus (Chesser et al. 2025a, 2025b), and the largest of the three North American species formerly known as accipiters (Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), Cooper's Hawk (*Astur cooperii*), and American Goshawk) (Squires and Reynolds 2024). Three weakly differentiated subspecies have been recognized, two found in Arizona: *A. a. atricapillus* and *A. a. apache* (Squires and Reynolds 2024). The validity of subspecies *apache* has been questioned (American Ornithologists' Union (AOU) 1957, Glinski 1998, Palmer 1988), but is recognized by Phillips et al. (1964), Stresemann and Amadon (1979), and Squires and Reynolds (2024).

Formerly included in *Accipiter* (Chesser et al. 2024), but genetic data (Catanach et al. 2024) show that *Accipiter sensu lato* did not form a monophyletic group, and that the species now

placed in *Astur* are not closely related to true *Accipiter* (Chesser et al. 2025). *Accipiter atricapillus* was formerly (AOU 1998) considered conspecific with *A. gentilis*, but North American Goshawks (*Accipiter atricapillus*) were separated from Eurasian Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) based on vocal and morphological differences (Sangster 2022) and polyphyly of mitochondrial DNA (Kunz et al. 2019) and treated as separate species (Chesser et al. 2023). Treated as a separate species from *A. gentilis* prior to AOU (1957), as American Goshawk (Chesser et al. 2023).

DESCRIPTION: The American Goshawk is the largest of the three North American accipiters (Squires and Reynolds 2023), and is the largest accipiter in Arizona, exhibiting the least size difference between sexes. The American Goshawk is a large forest hawk with long, broad wings and a long, rounded tail. Females are larger than males: average total length, male 55 cm, female 61cm; wing-span, male 98–104 cm, female 105–115 cm; mass, male 631–1,099 g, female 860–1,364 g (Squires and Reynolds 2023). Upperparts of adults are brown-gray to slate gray; head has black cap and pronounced white superciliary line; underparts are light gray with fine horizontal vermiculations and fine black vertical streaks. Undertail coverts white and often quite fluffy, especially during courtship or when alarmed. Tail is dark gray above with inconspicuous broad, dark bands (3–5); rounded tail tip may have thin white terminal band (reduced or absent with wear) (Squires and Reynolds 2023). Females are similar to males but browner above and more coarsely marked below, sometimes appearing barred. Feet, cere, toes, legs, and mouth lining are yellow; and eye is red (Squires and Reynolds 2023).

Juvenile: Juveniles are dark brown to brown-black dorsally through their first winter. Underparts are buffy brown with darker brown streaking (Kennedy 2003). Juvenile plumage is mostly lost in the first spring, though birds will retain some juvenile characteristics for up to four years (Squires and Reynolds 1997, Kennedy 2003, Pyle 2008).

AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:

Adult: Among North American accipiters, American Goshawk is the largest and heaviest bodied, appearing deep-chested with relatively broad wings and relatively short tail; wings appear tapered when soaring and pointed when flapping or stooping (Squires and Reynolds 2023). It is clearly larger than Sharp-shinned Hawk; in flight, the head protrudes more on American Goshawk, and the tail is broader and more rounded at the tip (Squires and Reynolds 2023).

Juvenile: Juvenile American Goshawk differs from juvenile Cooper's Hawk in having a more conspicuous pale superciliary line, more heavily streaked belly coverts, underwing coverts, and undertail coverts, a slightly wedge-shaped tail, and a tawny bar across the upper wing (Squires and Reynolds 2023). There is a subtle pattern of fine white lines outline dark bands

on the upper side of the juvenile American Goshawk's tail, which, when spread, shows staggered dark bars in a zigzag pattern rather than the even banding of juvenile Cooper's Hawk (Squires and Reynolds 2023).

ILLUSTRATIONS:

Color photos (Terres 1980:506)
Color photo (Clark 1987)
Color drawing (National Geographic 1987)
Color drawings (Scott 1988:190)
B&W photos (Block et al. 1993:34-38)
Color drawing of egg (Baicich and Harrison 1997)
Color drawing (Sloan, in Glinski 1998: pl. 11)
Color drawing (Sibley 2000)
Color photo (Glinski 2002)
Color photos (Squires and Reynolds 2024)

TOTAL RANGE: Holarctic distribution (Squires and Reynolds 1997). In North America, breeds from boreal Alaska and Canada south in the East as far as Pennsylvania and New York and in the West to the mountains of southern Arizona and New Mexico; disjunct populations occur in the mountains of western Mexico as far south as Jalisco and southern Guerrero (Howell and Webb 1995, Squires and Reynolds 1997). During winter, some birds are resident, whereas others are facultative migrants exhibiting short-distance elevational or latitudinal movements.

RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA: Statewide, they breed in high, forested mountains and plateaus, usually above 6,000 ft. Population on Kaibab Plateau exhibits one of the highest breeding densities known (Kennedy 1989).

SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS

BIOLOGY: The goshawk's alarm call is a slower and much more intimidating version of the *kek kek kek kek* alarm call of Cooper's Hawk, best rendered as *gek gek gek gek gek gek gek gek*. The alarm and solicitation calls of both species are often imitated by Stellar's Jays, resident in the vicinity of their nests. These realistic imitations are a source of frequent false alarms for those searching for accipiter nests (Snyder and Snyder 1998).

Home ranges during nesting vary from 94 to 3500 hectares depending on sex and habitat characteristics. Home ranges of males are typically larger than those of females, while the home ranges of non-breeders are poorly known, but may be larger than those of breeders

(Squires and Reynolds 2024). Predators include: Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*), Martens (*Martes americana*), Fishers (*Pekania pennanti*) and Wolverines (*Gulo gulo*) (Rohner and Doyle 1992, Paragi and Wholecheese 1994).

REPRODUCTION: Onset of breeding is generally delayed until two years of age. They may mate and lay eggs earlier but eggs generally are infertile. Lifelong pair bonds are formed when birds sexually mature. Nesting pairs have strong site fidelity, returning to same tract of woods for nesting. The same nest may be used by a pair for up to 5 consecutive years, but typically alternate between 2 or more nests with breeding areas (Squires and Reynolds 2024). They may attempt nesting for 1 to 5 years in territories following logging, even with low reproductive success.

Nest building begins in March, with breeding activity beginning approximately mid-April, with eggs laid by late April (Squires and Reynolds 2023). They maintain 1 to 8 alternate nests within a nest area. Nest heights vary according to tree species and regional tree-height characteristics. Nests are usually constructed in the lower one-third of nest trees or just below the forest canopy, and range from 9 m in Alaska to 16.9 m in New Mexico. The nest is a large shallow untidy structure of dead twigs, lined with pieces of bark and leafy green twigs or bunches of conifer needles, which are constantly renewed (Squires and Reynolds 2024). Usually 2–4 eggs are produced. The pale bluish-white eggs are short sub elliptical, non-glossy and rough-textured, 5 x 45 mm. Incubation, is principally performed by the female and takes 28–38 days. Hatching is asynchronous. Mostly the female performs brooding and feeding of nestlings; the male brings food to the nest. The young begin flying at 35–42 days and become independent at about 70 days. The nestlings are semi-altricial and downy. The first down is short, silky and thick above, sparser below and white. The second down is longer and woollier; gray tinged above and white below. Irides gray. Cere and feet light yellow. Captive breeding is relatively difficult and of questionable value in this species, since it is primarily threatened by habitat loss.

FOOD HABITS: Forages during short flights alternated with brief prey searches from perches. Also hunts by flying rapidly along forest edges, across openings and through dense vegetation (Squires and Reynolds 2024). Prey is taken on the ground, in vegetation or in the air. Despite being larger, females do not take heavier prey than males. Dominant mammalian prey includes tree squirrels, rock squirrels, and cottontails. Band-tailed Pigeons, Mourning Doves, Stellar's Jays, and Northern Flickers are the principal avian prey in Arizona, with Montezuma Quail comprising 20 percent of prey remains in southeastern Arizona nests (Snyder and Snyder 1998).

HABITAT:

Breeding: Overall, goshawks nest in a wide variety of forest types including deciduous, coniferous and mixed forests (Palmer 1988, Squires and Reynolds 1997, Squires and Reynolds 2023). They typically nest in mature or old growth forests, generally selecting larger tracts of forests over smaller tracts (Squires and Reynolds 2023). In Arizona, goshawk's nest most commonly in ponderosa pine forests along the Mogollon Rim and on the Kaibab Plateau, and in Arizona pine and ponderosa pine forests in the southeastern mountains. Occasionally, they breed in relatively low elevation oak forests in the southeastern portion of the state. The lowest-elevation nest found was at 4,900 feet. (Snyder and Snyder 1998). In the western U.S. they characteristically nest in coniferous forests including those dominated by ponderosa pine and lodgepole pine, or in mixed forests dominated by various coniferous species including fir, Douglas-fir, cedar, hemlock, spruce (Squires and Reynolds 2023). They will also nest in deciduous forests with aspen, paper birch and willow.

Non-breeding: Habitat requirements during winter are poorly understood.

ELEVATION: According to unpublished records in the HDMS (AGFD accessed 2003), they have been located at elevations of 4,750 - 9,120 ft (1,448 - 2,780m).

PLANT COMMUNITY:

POPULATION TRENDS: Little historical information on goshawk densities exists, and trends are poorly understood (Squires and Reynolds 2024). Populations in North America are apparently stable overall, but may be declining in the western United States (Kennedy 2003, Squires and Reynolds 2023). The most complete data is from the Kaibab National Forest showing a reduction from approximately 130 breeding pairs in 1972 (Crocker-Bedford, 1990) to approximately 30 occupied territories (Zinn and Tibbitts 1990). A total of 107 nesting territories (1991–1996) were located on a 1,754 square km study area on the Kaibab Plateau (BNA 1997). According to Snyder and Snyder (1998), “the goshawk was probably never abundant in Arizona, although it is widespread in high mountain habitats and can be locally abundant.”

SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION

Status definitions: <https://bit.ly/hdms-status-definitions>

Heritage Network Conservation Status Rank definitions: <https://bit.ly/hdms-rank-definitions>

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: None (USDI, FWS 1996)

STATE STATUS: 2 (AZGFD, AWCS 2022)
OTHER STATUS: Bureau of Land Management Sensitive –
 subsp. *apache* (USDI, BLM AZ 2010)
 Forest Service Sensitive – both subspecies
 (USDA, FS Region 3 1999, 2007, 2013)
 Group 4 – subsp. *atricapillus* (NNDFW,
 NESL 2001, 2005)
 Determined Threatened (Secretaria de
 Medio Ambiente 2000, 2010)

PREVIOUS STATUS

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS: C2, as *A. gentilis* (USDI, FWS 1991, 1994)
STATE STATUS: 1B, as *A. gentilis atricapillus* (AGFD,
 SWAP 2012)
 Candidate, as *A. gentilis* (AZGFD, WSCA
 1996 in prep)
 Candidate, as *A. gentilis* (AZGFD, TNW
 1988)
OTHER STATUS: Bureau of Land Management Sensitive, as
A. gentilis (USDI, BLM 2008)

MANAGEMENT FACTORS: Timber harvest is the principal threat to breeding populations (Crocker-Bedford 1990). In addition to the relatively long-term impacts of removing nest trees and degrading habitat by reducing stand density and canopy cover, logging activities conducted near nests during the incubation and nestling periods can have an immediate impact: nest failure due to abandonment. Breeding areas need protection from excessive logging. Crocker-Bedford (1986) proposes 20–200 acre buffers. Kennedy (1990) recommends 1600–acre buffers. Kaibab National Forest goshawk buffers are 20 acres (Smith et al. 1991). Other factors are fire suppression, loss of prey habitat, insect and trees disease outbreaks, and grazing can result in loss of nesting habitat.

PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN: Protection from logging around breeding sites varies from National Forest to National Forest. Kaibab National Forest buffers are 20 acres (Smith et al. 1991).

The Apache Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis apache*) was listed as a C2 candidate species under the Endangered Species Act in 1989 (USFWS 1989). Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) was added as a C2 candidate in 1991 (USFWS 1991) with only Northern Goshawk remaining on the 1994 candidate list (USFWS 1994). The species was removed

from the candidate list in 1996 when U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service discontinued the designation of Category 2 candidate species (USWFS 1996).

SUGGESTED PROJECTS: Research needs to address several areas:

1. Intensive surveys of National Forests to find unknown breeding territories.
2. Monitoring of known populations to detect declines in breeding success.
3. Color banding studies to gain access to information such as degree of site fidelity and survivorship data.
4. Perform habitat analysis on known goshawk territories to refine management data.
5. Additional studies on population size, trends and life history (life span, fidelity, dispersal, diet composition, habitat use).
6. Inventory and monitoring techniques need to be improved.
7. Need to evaluate the effects of pesticides and extent of movement patterns of all populations.
8. Determining how changes in forest structure and landscape pattern affect population viability

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:

BLM - Kingman and Arizona Strip Field Offices

DOD - Fort Huachuca Military Reservation, Navajo Army Depot

NPS - Chiricahua National Monument, and Grand Canyon and Saguaro National Parks

State - State Land Department

TNC - Ramsey Canyon

Tribal - Navajo Nation

USFS - Apache-Sitgreaves, Coconino, Coronado, Kaibab, Prescott, and Tonto National Forests

Private.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

“Goshawk” was derived from the Anglo-Saxon words gos for goose and havoc for hawk-hence, a hawk that captures geese (“Goose Hawk”).

Revised:	1991-02-22 (DKW)
	1993-08-24 (SSS)
	1995-08-09 (DBI)
	1997-03-05 (SMS)
	2003-05-16 (AMS)
	2003-06-18 (SMS)
	2013-11-14 (BDT)
	2022-12-19 (MBL)
	2024-10-11 (CPS)
	2025-10-07 (MSB)

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