



## Red-listed species

are those that have been legally designated, or are being considered for legal designation, as Endangered or Threatened.

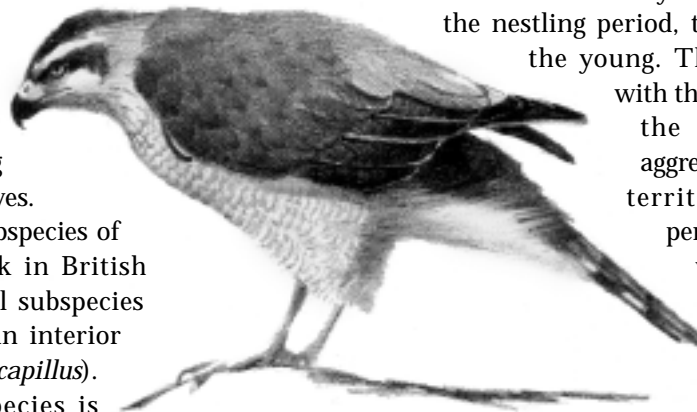
# Northern Goshawk

## *Accipiter gentilis*

### At a Glance

The Northern Goshawk is a large, sturdy hawk. Like other Accipiters, it has a fairly long tail and broad wings with rounded tips. It is about 60 centimetres long, with a wingspan of just over one metre, about the size of a Raven. It weighs between 0.6 and 1.4 kilograms. The females are larger than the males. The most noticeable feature of the adult is its white eyestripe over a blood-red eye. The back is blue-grey. Underparts are light grey with darker bars. Juvenile goshawks are much browner, with heavy streaking below, and yellow eyes.

We have two subspecies of Northern Goshawk in British Columbia: a coastal subspecies (*A. g. laingi*) and an interior subspecies (*A. g. atricapillus*). The coastal subspecies is usually smaller and darker. The Northern Goshawk's call is a harsh "kak-kak-kak."



### This is the Life

Two to four eggs are usually laid in April or early May. The female incubates the eggs, which hatch in about 32 days. The young goshawks can fly about six weeks later, but stay near the nest for another four weeks. On average, only two chicks survive to fledge.

The females do most of the work of building the nest and incubating the eggs. Males deliver food to the females while they are incubating and during the nestling period, then both parents feed the young. The males usually stay with the young for longer than the females. Both sexes aggressively defend the nest territory, and males may perform aerial displays to warn other birds where their territories are. One captive goshawk lived for nearly 19 years. They have been known to live up to 11 years in the wild.

### Home Sweet Home

The Northern Goshawk builds a large nest of sticks next to the trunk of a tree or at the top of a broken trunk. The nest can be up to 1.5 metres across and as much as 1 metre deep. It is usually lined with fresh conifer twigs. Goshawks usually build their nests in large trees in old-growth or mature coniferous forests or mixed coniferous and deciduous forests of similar mature age and structure.

A pair of goshawks will use the same nesting territory year after year. Within this territory they may use as many as eight alternate nests in different years.

### What's on the Menu?

Squirrels, rabbits and hares, crows, grouse, jays, thrushes, woodpeckers and other medium-sized birds and mammals are the main items in the Northern Goshawk's diet. They also eat smaller prey including reptiles and insects.

Goshawks hunt mostly below the canopy in open forests. They use series of short flights, with stops on high branches to search for prey. They rely on speed, rapidly twisting and turning among the trees, to capture it. They kill by squeezing with their powerful feet, driving their sharp claws into the victim's body. They then take it to a snag or stump to pluck the feathers before eating it.



# British Columbia's Wildlife at Risk

## NO KIDDING!

"Goshawk" is an old Anglo-Saxon word meaning "goosehawk", from this hawk's ability to catch and eat larger birds.



Ranchers working near goshawk nesting sites often learn to wear hard hats as this hawk can be very aggressive when defending its nest!



The scientific name, *gentilis*, does not mean "gentle", but "belonging to a noble clan" (this is similar to the meaning of "gentleman").



## Where and When

The Goshawk is found in much of Europe, Asia and North America. It breeds in most of Canada except the high Arctic and the southern prairies. In the winter it can be found as far south as northern Mexico.

In British Columbia, the *laingi* subspecies breeds on Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands, and other coastal areas. The *atricapillus* subspecies breeds in forested areas throughout most of the rest of British Columbia east of the Coast Range. It is uncertain which subspecies lives on the mainland coast. Northern Goshawks are resident in the province, remaining here throughout the winter. Some may migrate south if prey abundance is low.

## How They're Doing



The *laingi* subspecies of Northern Goshawk requires large areas of old-growth and mature forest. Large-scale timber harvesting removes much suitable nesting and foraging habitat. Shorter rotations in coastal areas result in logging an area again before the forest can grow back to a structure suitable for goshawks. Because of this, the *laingi* subspecies is believed to be in jeopardy, and is on the British Columbia Red List. The Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) has designated this subspecies as Vulnerable. The *atricapillus* subspecies is on the provincial Yellow List (not at risk).

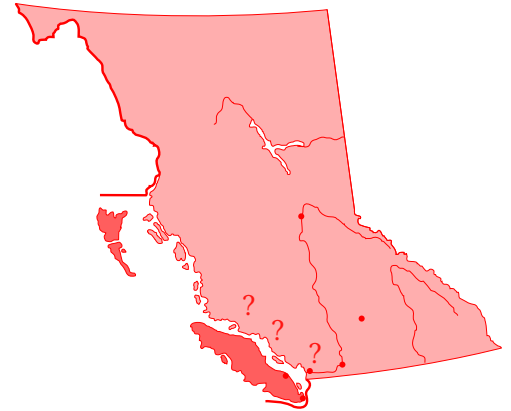
## How We're Helping

Northern Goshawks, their nests and eggs are protected by the British Columbia *Wildlife Act*.

The Forest Practices Code provides some protection of goshawk habitat under the Biodiversity Guidelines and the Identified Wildlife Management Strategy. Research and inventory projects across the province are helping us learn more about this bird and its habitat needs.

## Present breeding distribution of the Northern Goshawk in British Columbia

-  *A.g.laingi*
-  *A.g.atricapillus*



## How You Can Help

Northern Goshawks are not very tolerant of humans near their nests. If a nest is discovered, it is best to keep a good distance away. These hawks, especially nesting females, may even attack a human who strays too close to the nest tree.

Report sightings of birds and nests to the Conservation Data Centre in Victoria or to the nearest office of the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. This will help to provide more information about the numbers of birds in the province. Detailed information is the most useful. The location, date, number of birds and habitat must be known, and any behaviour you see should also be reported.

You can find out more about the Wildlife Branch and Conservation Data Centre at:

<http://www.elp.gov.bc.ca>

Conservation Data Centre  
Resources Inventory Branch  
Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks  
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Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks

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