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SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

Accipiter striatus

Range & Habitat

Although Pennsylvania is south of the main breeding area for the Sharp-shinned Hawk, they are widely distributed in wooded areas across the state. The Sharp-shinned Hawk prefers mountainous regions in the east and dense forests for nesting, and they primarily feed on small birds. Their secretive behavior, and preference to nest in thick vegetation, makes them easy to overlook during breeding.



Nesting Behavior

Sharp-shinned Hawks prefer nesting in small secluded stands of conifers with dense foliage in large forests, but they have also been observed using oaks, maples, and aspens.

Although pairs often return to the same nesting area annually, they rarely reuse the same nest. The typical incubation period ranges from 30-32 days. For the initial 10-14 days post-hatching, the female remains with the young while the male hunts for the female and young. Once the young are ready to leave the nest, around day 24-27, they stay close to the nest for approximately a month, gradually becoming independent hunters. This is a great time to listen for the noisy young calling out 'kik-kik-kik' as they beg for food from the adults.



Slender, blue-jay-sized accipiter, with short, rounded wings, and a long, rudder-like, square-tipped tail.

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What Does a Sharp-shinned Hawk Nest Look Like?

Nests are 20-24 inches across and are made of thin twigs, bark chips, and greenery. Nests are often placed on horizontal branches against the tree's main trunk near the top of the tree. They can generally be found 20-40 feet above the ground.

Status & Threats

The Sharp-shinned Hawk, though not well monitored during the breeding period, is currently listed as a species of "Maintenance Concern" in Pennsylvania due to its dependence on conifers and contiguous forest. Migrating populations have shown notable declines throughout the state and across North America. Sharp-shinned Hawks face localized threats such as declining prey populations, habitat degradation, especially in Neotropical forests, and collision risks near bird feeders and roads. There's also concern about residual pesticide impacts on their reproductive health.



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Conservation & Management During Nesting

Strategies should prioritize habitat protection, including protecting dense conifer stands in large forest blocks, especially near forest openings or streams. In addition, public awareness about collision risks, monitoring pesticide levels, and reducing human disturbances during nesting will help to protect this secretive species.