

Species Sheets: Sharp-shinned Hawk



photo by Alan Nelson ©

Common name: Sharp-shinned Hawk

Latin Name: *Accipiter striatus*

Field Marks: Length 10-14"
Wing span 20-28"



Smallest North American accipiter, or short-winged, long-tailed forest hawk and most common. About size of a robin. “Sharpies” may be told from the larger Cooper’s Hawk by round heads and squared-off, or notched tails. Females much larger than males. Adults reddish brown on the underside and blue-gray on the back, males bluer. Juveniles up to one year have brown streaks on a white underside, with brown “dorsally” or on the back. Are active in flight with quick wing beats, often with a glide after five or so flaps as they get to the cover of the woods, and fast wing beats when hunting their avian prey. Young birds have yellow eyes that changes to red as the birds get older. Sharp-shinned Hawks get their name because the leading edge of leg has a pointed keel.

Habitat:

Thick stands of immature Douglas fir and other conifers during breeding season. Sharp-shins are very secretive birds.

Behavior:

May be seen briefly at bird feeders because of their diet – 90 % birds that are caught in flight by chasing down in bursts of speed and tactic of chase surprise. May hide in foliage and use landmarks like hills, houses and hedges to suddenly appear

and chase down the one prey bird that wasn’t paying attention, one that is disabled in some way, or one that is just unlucky. May still-hunt from perch. Often have “butcher block” for plucking prey and removing parts that are discarded, which is often near nest.

Nest and Eggs:

Stick nests built each year, even on top of old ones, usually on limbs right next to tree trunk. Nest lined with bark and greenery. Nests in dense conifers and difficult to locate. Look for plucked bird feathers from prey. 4-5 eggs, incubated only by female.

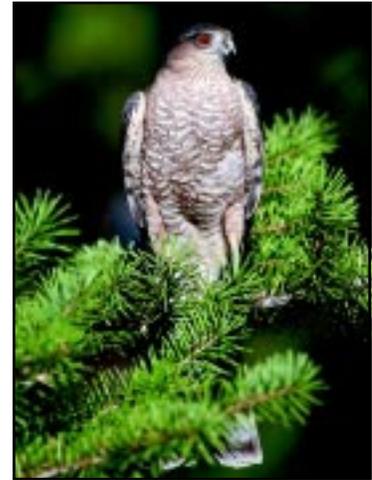
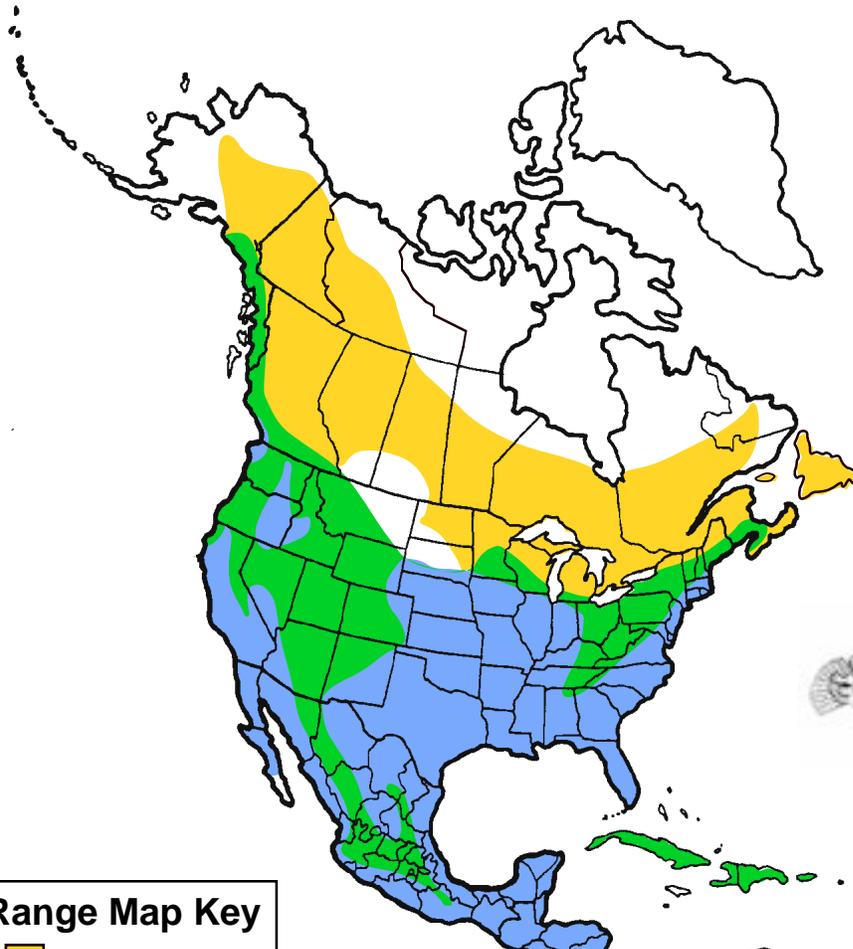
Movement:

Most migratory of accipiters, some birds moving far south in to Central America for winter. Many winter in Montana. May move from mountains to valley bottoms.

Interesting Fact:

Large female Sharp-shin may be mistaken for smaller male Cooper’s Hawk. They have very similar coloring, live in the same habitats, and fly with the alternating flap and glide. Although their sizes don’t overlap, it is often difficult to judge size in the field, especially with such swift fliers

Range Map: Sharp-shinned Hawk



Sharp-shinned Hawk, Copyright © Alan Nelson



These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

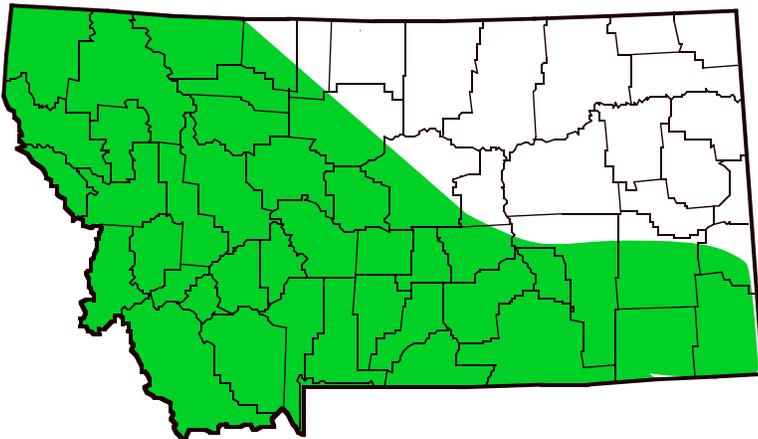
Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.