

all about

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SPARROWHAWK

Accipiter nisus

The sparrowhawk is a yellow eyed hawk with short, rounded wings and a long dark striped tail. The male sparrowhawk is about 30cm long. The female is a little bit bigger and measures about 38cm. The male sparrowhawk has a brownish back and wings, and has characteristic dark striped underparts. Another distinguishing feature of the female sparrowhawk is the white stripe behind each eye. Both the male and the female have a wingspan of approximately 66cm.

The sparrowhawk has yellow legs and strong talons in which to carry prey. Its hooked beak enables the sparrowhawk to tear prey into pieces small enough to swallow. As its name suggests the sparrowhawk preys on small birds. It also eats small mammals and insects. Sparrowhawks, like all birds of prey, create a small parcel of those parts of their prey, such as fur, bones and feathers, which they find to be indigestible. This is called a pellet. They regurgitate these and they may be found

on the ground near their eating place.



Where does the sparrowhawk live?

The nest of the sparrowhawk is made of twigs and sticks and is lined with dead leaves. The nest is bulky and is usually built 10–12 metres above the ground in a tree. A clutch of four to six eggs is laid which are greenish-white with brown streaks. Young sparrowhawks have a voracious appetite, and need to eat two to three 'sparrow-sized' birds each day.

In Scotland, the preferred habitat of the sparrowhawk is open woodland. Some sparrowhawks have adapted to an urban lifestyle and prey on small garden birds.

What is being done to protect or improve this habitat?

Many new coniferous forests have been planted in Scotland since the First World War. These forests have provided the sparrowhawk with more places in which to live.

Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act it is illegal to trap or kill sparrowhawks or other birds of prey.

In the past, many sparrowhawks were poisoned by eating small birds which had themselves eaten crops containing pesticides. Sparrowhawks are high in the food chain. By the early 1960s the dangers had been realised and restrictions were imposed on the use of the more toxic pesticides. Some of the chemicals caused the eggs of the sparrowhawk to be soft shelled, which caused breeding to fail. Sparrowhawk numbers, which had declined, are now increasing.

What can you do to help?

Find out more about bird life by visiting a local nature reserve. For more information, write to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Join a group which is concerned about birds and wildlife. Two groups are: the Young Ornithologists Club (YOC) – the junior section of RSPB; and WATCH Scotland – the junior section of the

Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT).

Take part in a census, (survey) if you are good at identifying birds. For more information write to YOC.

Contact addresses

Forestry Commission, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh EH12 7AT

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (YOC), Dunedin House, 24 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP

Scottish Wildlife Trust (WATCH), Cramond House, Kirk Cramond, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS

World Wide Fund for Nature Scotland, 8 The Square, Aberfeldy, Perthshire PH15 2DD

A poster of a sparrowhawk is available free of charge from Scottish Natural Heritage, Publications Section, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW

Glossary

Habitat

A habitat is a place where a bird or animal lives. The habitat provides the bird or animal with the food and shelter which it needs to survive.

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Forestry Commission
Scotland

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