

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

This resource can be cited as:

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

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## Cooper's Hawk     *Accipiter cooperii*

The Cooper's Hawk is a crow-sized woodland raptor characterized by short, rounded wings and a long rudder-like tail. Its usual flight pattern consists of several rapid wing beats alternating with brief bouts of gliding. However, when in pursuit of its avian prey, the Cooper's Hawk exhibits explosive acceleration and reckless abandon. Sexes are similar in plumage, but the female is larger and more powerfully built than her mate. It breeds from southern Canada south throughout most of the United States to northern Mexico (AOU 1983).

**Habitat.** In the eastern United States, birds comprise 80 to 90% of their diet (Meng 1959, Storer 1966, Toland 1985b). Pronounced sexual dimorphism (a size difference between the sexes) enables a pair of Cooper's Hawks to exploit a wide range of avian prey; the male takes small to medium-sized songbirds, and the female selects larger birds up to the size of Rock Doves, Pileated Woodpeckers, and crows (Storer 1966, Toland 1985b).

When nesting, Cooper's Hawks prefer deciduous, mixed, or coniferous forests with relatively closed canopies interspersed with clearings or other open habitats (Meng 1951; Hennessey 1978). The nest of the Cooper's Hawk is placed in either a deciduous or coniferous tree, usually with a densely foliated individual of the dominant species (Millsap 1981) growing near a clearing. The nest, which often appears to have a shaggy rim, is invariably lined with flakes of bark (Palmer 1988). The 3 to 5 bluish or greenish-white eggs marked with brown spots are incubated for approximately 32 days, and the young fledge at 30 to 34 days of age (Millsap 1981; Palmer 1988).

**Seasonal Occurrence.** In Florida, Cooper's Hawks nest from April through July (Kale and Maehr 1990).

**Status.** In Florida, the Cooper's Hawk is an uncommon and rather sparsely distributed breeder over the northern two-thirds of the state, south to Highlands County (Layne 1986). The rarity of this hawk and its secretive behavior challenged Atlas field-workers to locate it, and undoubtedly many birds were missed; especially in quadrangles that were only briefly surveyed. Not surprisingly, it was especially difficult to confirm as a breeder only 15% of the quadrangle records were in this category.

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Sponsored by Donald K. Baldwin



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