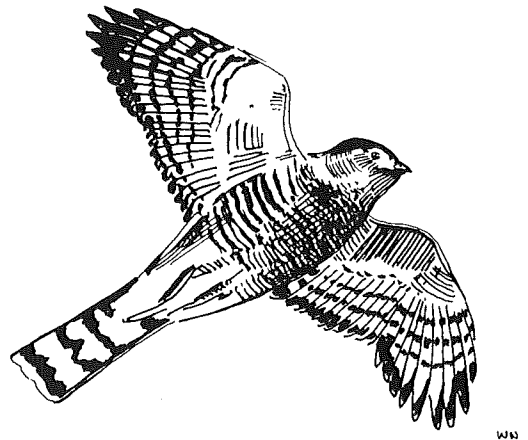


Sharp-shinned Hawk

Accipiter striatus

Sharp-shinned Hawks are found continent-wide, north to the tree limit, and their range extends into South America. Their center of abundance in North America seems to be the extensive forests of eastern Canada (Pough 1951). The species has apparently declined or disappeared as a breeding bird from many areas in the eastern part of its range during the last two decades. However, it continues to be a very common migrant in eastern North America, and concentrations may be found at coastal localities and along mountain ridges. Sharpies overwinter in a large portion of their nesting range south of Canada. In Vermont they are common migrants in spring and fall, and are best known at this time. In addition to their usual steady, quick-flapping flight followed by short intervals of rapid sailing, during migration they frequently soar gracefully in the open. Sharpies arrive in Vermont in early April and begin moving southward in mid September. Most birds have left Vermont by late October (RVB, 1973-84). They are rare and local in winter at lower elevations in the southern parts of the state. They frequently visit birdfeeders in search of prey.

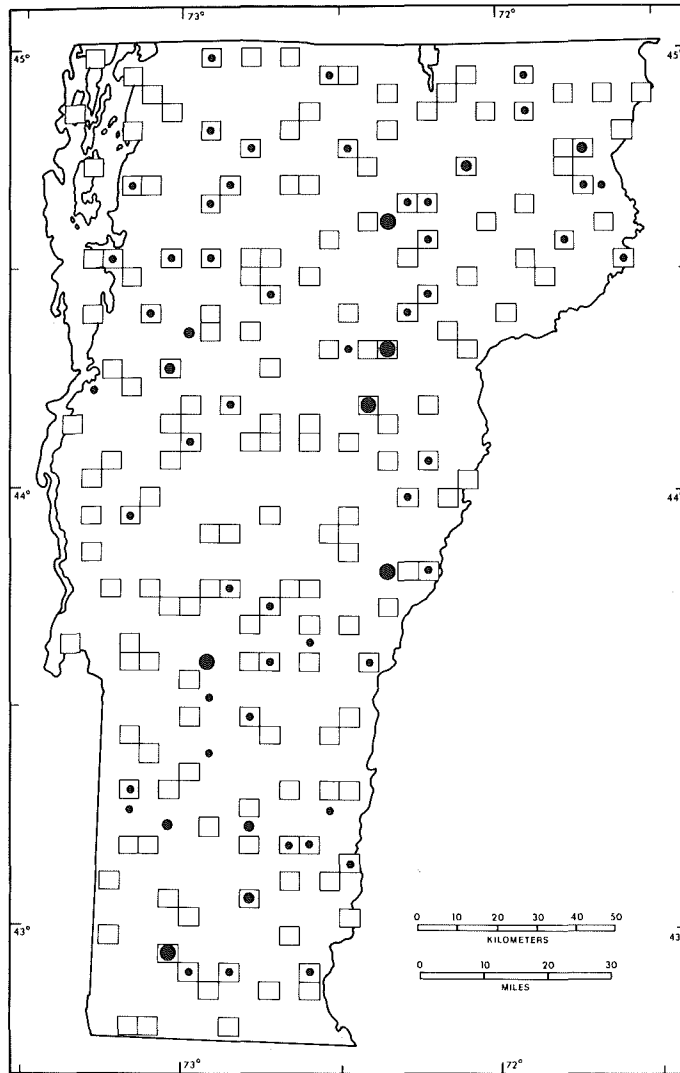
Breeding Sharp-shinned Hawks are secretive, and require remote woodlands near clearings or borders of brushy meadows for nesting. They prefer the thick cover of evergreens in the midst of deciduous stands. The nest, which is built in a crotch of a tree or on a horizontal limb against a tree trunk, is well concealed. Only one nest with eggs was discovered during the Atlas Project. Of five nests found in Vermont at the turn of the century, two were placed in red spruce and three were found in hemlocks. The nest is a well-made, shallow, broad platform of interlaced twigs and small sticks that is often lined with strips of bark. It is large for the size of the bird, often measuring 0.6 m (2 ft) in diameter. Nests are placed 3-18 m (10-60 ft) above ground; average height is 9-11 m (30-35 ft). The nests found in Ver-



mont were placed 6-14 m (18-45 ft) above ground. Sometimes Sharpies build in cran- nies along cliffs in or the cavities of hollow trees. A new nest is usually constructed each year. Sometimes the same nest is reused, with new material added. Occasionally abandoned crow or squirrel nests are adapted.

One brood is produced yearly. Four to 5 eggs, often 3 (rarely, 6 to 8), are placed in a slight depression in the nest. In Vermont, five nests had 5 eggs, and one nest had 3. The eggs are white to cream-colored, blotched with various shades of brown. Nests with eggs have been found in Vermont from May 15 to June 13. Incubation, performed primarily by the female, is begun when the clutch is completed (Rust 1914; Platt 1977), and takes 34 to 35 days. The young leave the nest when they are 23 days old. Nestling songbirds form a considerable part of the diet of these young hawks (Brown and Amadon 1968). As the young approach maturity they may each require at least three or four small birds or the equivalent each day (Forbush 1925).

Accipiters are bird hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks are quintessential accipiters. They are fierce and skillful hunters, and are swift and bold. Sharp-shinned Hawks watch for prey from inconspicuous perches and surprise their victims by pouncing quickly. They glide low to the ground, skimming over bushes and darting under branches through clearings. Their short rounded wings and long tail are well adapted to



No. of priority blocks in which recorded

TOTAL 48 (27%)
 Possible breeding: 41 (86% of total)
 Probable breeding: 4 (8% of total)
 Confirmed breeding: 3 (6% of total)

Physiographic regions in which recorded

	no. of priority blocks	% of region's priority blocks	% of species' total priority blocks
Champlain Lowlands	11	35	23.0
Green Mountains	14	26	29.0
North Central	7	37	15.0
Northeast Highlands	6	38	12.5
East Central	3	16	6.0
Taconic Mountains	1	6	2.0
Eastern Foothills	6	25	12.5

flight within forests. Males and females feed on different prey items (Storer 1966; Mueller and Berger 1970). Although they catch primarily small birds—warblers, sparrows, thrushes, and jays—the larger female is capable of securing quails, doves, and even young chickens. Sharp-shinned Hawks also take small mammals such as mice, shrews, bats, and squirrels, as well as frogs, grasshoppers, moths, and butterflies.

Because of their habits, Sharp-shinned Hawks have been among the most persecuted raptors. Early ornithologists regarded the species as harmful, and Eaton (1914) recommended that the species be “destroyed whenever more desirable song

and game birds are to be preserved.” Predators are an essential part of any ecosystem, and Sharp-shinned Hawks are highly efficient woodland hunters.

The Atlas Project established that the Sharp-shinned Hawk is a more widespread breeder in Vermont than was previously known, and that Vermont currently has a sufficient breeding population to remove the species from consideration for Vermont’s proposed Threatened or Species of Special Concern lists.

WHITNEY NICHOLS