



Cooper's Hawk

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(*Accipiter cooperii*)

OVERVIEW

Cooper's Hawks are larger than Sharp-shinned Hawks but almost identical in plumage and very similar in shape. Cooper's Hawks from the West are smaller on average than in the East, and appear even more like Sharp-shinned Hawks, especially male Cooper's Hawks. However, Cooper's Hawks always display relatively longer wings and tails and larger heads. As well, they are steady fliers with somewhat stiffer, less furious, powerful wing beats compared with Sharp-shinned Hawks. They soar on flat wings or with a slight dihedral, and glide on slightly bowed wings. Females are larger than males and generally appear sizeable in the field, but males often seem no larger than Sharp-shinned Hawks.

In a glide, Cooper's Hawks look compact, similar to Sharp-shinned Hawks, but their heads and tails extend farther, and they show longer, less squared "hands" in comparison. Cooper's Hawks in active molt can exhibit square-tipped tails or squared-off wings, making them appear even more similar to Sharp-shinned Hawks. Also, the farther away a Cooper's Hawk is, the more similar it appears to a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

PLUMAGE

Juvenile Cooper's Hawks are whitish below with dark streaking on the body and dark

brown above. Cooper's Hawks typically show the least prominent streaking of the accipiters, but the streaking on the underside varies in density. **The underside plumage is often not useful in identifying distant juvenile accipiters.** Juvenile Cooper's Hawks show a tawny wash to the head. While juvenile Goshawks may show this trait, most Sharp-shinned Hawks do not. As with Sharp-shinned Hawks, Cooper's Hawks have indistinct banded tails; however, **the white tail tip is usually more prominent on Cooper's Hawks than on Sharp-shinned Hawks.** When backlit against a blue sky, the white tip to the tail of Sharp-shinned Hawks can appear quite prominent.

Adult Cooper's Hawks are pale below with rufous barring and blue-gray on top. Adults have a dark cap and a pale nape, whereas adult Sharp-shinned Hawks lack the pale nape and thus a distinct cap. **Male Cooper's are slightly more colorful than females,** especially on top, where they show blue upperwing coverts and dark primaries compared to the more uniform gray-blue upperwing of females. Some adult females are a brownish-gray above, similar in color to that of juveniles, especially in spring if they are heavily faded. Underside plumage of Cooper's Hawks can fade by spring and appear whitish. Adult male Cooper's Hawks have gray cheeks, but males in their first year of adulthood often have rufous cheeks like most females.



CH 01 - Juvenile Cooper's Hawks are pale below with brown streaking on the chest (top left). In direct sunlight, juveniles (shown, top right) and adults can appear all white below. When shadowed (middle left) or in poor light (middle right), Cooper's Hawks can appear overall dark. When backlit, plumage and wing shape can be difficult to judge (bottom left, juvenile). Juveniles show tawny heads when seen head-on (bottom right). Note bowed wings of all Cooper's Hawks when gliding. Note the lengthy overall shape compared to that of Sharp-shinned Hawks.



CH 02 - The rufous underside of **adults** is obvious in good light (top left) or over snow (top right). When backlit (middle left) or shadowed (middle right), the plumage of **adults** can be difficult to discern. In fall, **adults** may show flight feather molt, causing squared wing tips and tail tip (bottom left). Head-on, the pale cheeks and dark cap of **adults** are sometimes obvious (bottom right). Adult Cooper's Hawks are overall stockier than juveniles and more similar in shape to Sharp-shinned Hawks.



CH 03 - Juveniles are brown on top with a tawny head (top left). **Adult males** are blue on top with dark primaries, gray cheeks, and a dark cap (top right). **Adult females** are uniform blue-gray on top with pale cheeks and a dark cap (middle left). Molting or faded **adult males** can appear brownish on top and square-tailed; note the gray cheeks but lack of a white tail tip (middle right). Some **adult females** are normally brownish-gray on top; note the dark cap and flight feather molt (bottom left). In poor light, **adults** (shown) and sometimes juveniles can appear blackish on top (bottom right).



CH 04 - Many **Sharp-shinned Hawks** have rounded tail tips when closed (top left); **Cooper's Hawks** in spring often show squared tail tips when closed due to wear (top right). Sharp-shinned Hawks with full crops (middle left) can appear large-headed and similar to **Cooper's Hawks** (middle right). When backlit, the white tail tip of both **Sharp-shinned Hawks** (bottom left) and **Cooper's Hawks** (bottom right) can appear prominent. Note the larger head and longer wings and tail of the **Cooper's Hawk** compared to the **Sharp-shinned Hawk**.