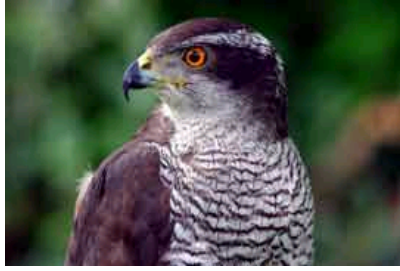


Goshawk

The goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is a large but secretive woodland bird of prey



A shy woodland bird, most easily detected during its sky-dance display flights over its territory from January to April.

Goshawks can be confused with sparrowhawks, but are much larger with relatively longer, thinner wings, a bigger head and the pale stripe over the eye is more prominent. Males are some 20 per cent smaller than females and are blue-grey above with horizontal grey stripes below giving them a pale grey appearance. Females, which are the size of a buzzard, are brownish-grey above and the stripes on the underside are also brown. Young birds are generally much browner.

Length: 48-62cm; wingspan: 135-165cm

Status in UK

400 pairs, increasing; GREEN listed; reintroduced resident

Population trends

Early records are unreliable as the goshawk was confused with both sparrowhawk and peregrine. It was already a rare bird, largely confined to Scotland, by the early 1800s, and appears to have become extinct by the end of that century.

They began to nest sporadically from the 1920s, probably as a result of escaped falconers' birds. The species was breeding regularly 50 years ago and the population expanded rapidly during the 1970s due to escapes and deliberate releases.

The population is now self-sustaining and has continued to increase. Maturing post-war conifer plantations, especially in Scotland and Wales, favour them and because of their retiring nature the population is likely to be underestimated. They are still actively persecuted.

Habitat and distribution

A bird of large mature conifer forests, but will hunt in open country close to woodland. In the lowlands it nests in smaller woods in well-wooded countryside.

The species now breeds throughout south and central England, as far north as Yorkshire and in parts of East Anglia. It is widespread throughout Wales and in the south of Scotland and around the Moray Firth.

Breeding

Builds its own nest or renovates an old one in a large tree 10 to 20 metres above ground.

Feeding

Birds, including pigeons, crows and gamebirds, and mammals, especially rabbits and squirrels. Its prey is taken after a short dashing flight often from a concealed perch.