



Earliest Nest and Eggs of Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) for Coastal British Columbia

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Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*; Figure 1) is a widely distributed species in British Columbia most often recorded in autumn migration when singles or small numbers of northernmost breeders pass through the province. Unlike that in autumn, spring migration is less pronounced and corridors are not well delineated. The secretive nature of the species and its dense breeding habitat make finding nests difficult. In fact, there are fewer than 30 breeding records for the province since the late 1800s and most of these are of fledged young from interior locations (Campbell et al. 1990).

The breeding status of Sharp-shinned Hawk on the coast of British Columbia has not been clarified although the species has been recorded at many widely scattered locations during the breeding season from late May to early August (Campbell et al. 1990). This is mainly due to lack of specific details for actual nests or descriptions of the ages of fledged young. In addition, assumptions of breeding have been made from behaviour of adults, such as persistent calling, courtship displays, copulation, or pairs observed in summer in suitable nesting habitat.

The earliest published record of Sharp-shinned Hawk breeding on the coast of British Columbia was by A.C. Brooks (1917, p. 37-38) who wrote:

“**Accipiter velox** [*A. striatus*] Sharp-shinned hawk. – Common. I have found it breeding on the floor of the valley [Chilliwack area] as well as in the mountains. Sometimes seen in midwinter.”

Additional supporting details were not provided by Brooks but he must have been referring to a specimen he collected at Sumas on 18 July 1895,



Figure 1. The male Sharp-shinned Hawk (photo) usually roosts near the nest while the female does almost all of the nest-building and incubation. The male does, however, provide the female with most of the food during these stages. *Photo by Mark Nyhof.*

which is housed in the collections at the Museum of Comparative Zoology (MCZ 247137) at Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Jeremiah Trimble, Curatorial Associate (ornithology), checked the specimen (*Accipiter fuscus* [*A. striatus*]) collected by A.C. Brooks and confirmed it was “a rather young downy chick, likely a male” (pers. comm.). No additional information was available.

No new breeding information was included in Brooks and Swarth (1925, p. 54) although general statements were made for the province. The authors noted “...to be found nesting (though in small numbers) at any point, either inland or on the coast...a scarce breeder at Masset, Queen Charlotte Islands (Brooks, MS [Manuscript]).” Earlier statements for the Chilliwack area were repeated.

The earliest coastal record of a Sharp-shinned Hawk with details for a nest and eggs was uncovered in the field notes of Delbert Boyd Ryder, father of the late Glenn R. Ryder (see Campbell and Henderson 2013). The nest was discovered in an old-growth forest composed of western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*), Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), and western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) adjacent to their farm

in Mount Lehman. His notes verbatim follow.

May 29, 1904 – Two [adults] calling as I walked into this woodland. The hawks made their feelings known to me – they did not want me here. I wondered why so I started looking up into the trees and sure enough there is a nest. It was roughly 30 feet [9.2m] up in a climbable w. [western] hemlock tree. The nest was big and spread out on three trunk branches. I made the climb upwards and the female called and left her nest quickly. They both came back calling and made several passes at me between the branches of the tree. They did come close but never struck me. As I got up to the nest they became more agitated... The nest contained 5 nicely marked eggs of a bluish white pale over all colour and marked boldly with dark and light browns to reddish brown, mainly in blotches of colour mostly at the large end of the egg [Figure 2]. I did not stay long, just long enough to make some notes. I then got down and left the area.

There is only one additional nest with eggs for the coast of British Columbia in the files of the British Columbia Nest Record Scheme through 2013. The nest was located adjacent to Forest Lawn Cemetery [Forest Lawn Memorial Park] in Burnaby (10U 500517E



Figure 2. While it may be challenging to identify age-classes of Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper’s Hawk, the colour of their eggs is completely different. The eggs of Sharp-shinned Hawk (left), a prize for early collectors, are heavily marked with splotches of shades of brown on a dull white base. Cooper’s Hawk eggs (right) are unmarked with a bluish tinge. Photos by R. Wayne Campbell.

5454384N; el 59 m) on 7 July 1963 by the author. It was built on a branch next to the trunk of a young Douglas maple (*Acer glabrum*) 4.9 m (16 ft) above ground. The stick and twig nest contained four eggs. On 9 July the adult female was at the nest, still with four eggs, and on 13 July the nest was tipped and empty. No adults were present.

The nest discovered by Delbert Ryder on 29 May with five eggs extends the early segment of the breeding chronology for Sharp-shinned Hawk in British Columbia reported by Campbell et al. (1990) by about one month. If nest-building (see Bildstein and Meyer 2000) and egg-laying (10 days; Palmer 1988) are back-dated, breeding may begin on the south coast in early May. In southern Ontario, Peck and James (1983) report egg dates as early as 30 April.

Between 1954 and 2013, the late Glenn Ryder documented more breeding records for birds in the Lower Mainland region of the province than anyone else (Campbell and Henderson 2013). Breeding season records of Sharp-shinned Hawk were very rare and the one and only active nest (adult at nest with white wash) was found in 1981 in Fort Langley.

Over the 60 years of observation on the southwest mainland coast Glenn noticed a gradual decline in summer occurrences of Sharp-shinned Hawk that coincided with increasing urbanization and the spread of the adaptable and more urban-nesting Cooper's Hawk. In the late 1990s, he mentioned that Sharp-shinned Hawk as a breeding species in lowlands in the Lower Mainland was extirpated (pers. comm.). He surmised that a few pairs may still nest at higher elevations in the local mountains. †

Acknowledgements

The detailed field notes of the late Glenn R. Ryder's father Delbert from the early 1900s continue to clarify some of the early ornithological history of British Columbia. I am grateful to Glenn for his foresight to preserve the field notes. Jeremiah Trimble, Curatorial Associate (ornithology) at the Museum of Comparative Zoology confirmed details for the age of the specimen collected by A.C. Brooks. Mark Nyhof provided the photo of the male Sharp-shinned Hawk.

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