



The Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
Wildlife Resources Division  
**RAPTORS FACT SHEET**



Known for their keen eyesight, sharp talons and striking appearance, raptors represent approximately eight percent of Georgia's birds. Eagles, falcons, hawks and owls, all found throughout Georgia, are categorized as raptors. They commonly are observed soaring high in the sky or perched in trees or on power-lines in search of prey. Their role as predators is defined by their ability to keep prey populations in check. This aspect alone proves these birds to be some of Georgia's most valuable and fascinating creatures.

Raptors found throughout Georgia:

Common Species

**Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)  
**Swallow-tailed Kite** (*Elanoides forficatus*)  
**Mississippi Kite** (*Ictinia mississippiensis*)  
**Bald Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)  
**Northern Harrier** (*Circus cyaneus*)  
**Sharp-shinned Hawk** (*Accipiter striatus*)  
**Cooper's Hawk** (*Accipiter cooperii*)  
**Red-shouldered Hawk** (*Buteo lineatus*)  
**Broad-winged Hawk** (*Buteo platypterus*)  
**Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)  
**American Kestrel** (*Falco sparverius*)  
**Merlin** (*Falco columbarius*)  
**Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*)  
**Barn Owl** (*Tyto alba*)  
**Eastern Screech Owl** (*Otus asio*)  
**Great Horned Owl** (*Bubo virginianus*)  
**Barred Owl** (*Strix varia*)

Rare, or Incidental Species

**Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentiles*)  
**Rough-legged Hawk** (*Buteo lagopus*)  
**Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos*)  
**Snowy Owl** (*Nyctea scandiaca*)  
**Long-eared Owl** (*Asio otus*)  
**Short-eared Owl** (*Asio flammeus*)  
**Northern Saw-whet Owl** (*Aegolius acadicus*)

## BIOLOGY

As the name implies, raptors are carnivorous (flesh eating) predators. Common to all of these birds is their excellent eyesight. Sharp, hooked beaks and talons allow them to grasp and tear their prey, which can range from insects, fish, amphibians and reptiles to small mammals and birds. Breeding occurs at different times of the year depending on the species. Females, usually the larger of the sexes, typically produce 1 to 3 eggs with nesting sites found in trees, cliff overhangs or abandoned buildings. After approximately one month of incubation, the young hatch out and fledge at one to two months of age, depending on the species.

## HABITAT

Raptors, like many species of wildlife, require specific varieties of habitats to thrive successfully. Some hawks,

falcons and owls require marginal wooded lots and/or fields to allow for sufficient hunting and nesting sites while others are quite adept at hunting in cover. Other raptors, such as eagles and ospreys, require tall trees for nesting and large open areas of water nearby to provide an abundance of fish near nesting sites. Although each species has its own ideal habitat requirements, all raptors require the same indispensable necessities of food, water and nesting sites.

## INJURED RAPTORS

Should you encounter an injured or dead raptor, it is important to know that both FEDERAL AND STATE LAWS render it ILLEGAL to harm or possess these birds. The best solution is to contact the Wildlife Resources Division or a certified wildlife rehabilitation center. These agencies have the proper credentials, such as licensing, and the experience to handle, transport and assist these birds.

## NUISANCE

Human destruction of natural habitat over the past century has led to an increase in wildlife/human interaction and with this comes an increased potential for wildlife to be considered a "nuisance." Barn owls are known to take up residence in chimneys, barns and other man-made structures and often are unwelcome due to their foul odors and noisy habits. Other raptor problems may include depredation of farm poultry (i.e. chickens, turkeys, ducks, etc.) or even household pets.

Prevention is considered the ultimate solution to nuisance situations in most cases. As such, the best way to minimize raptor nuisance problems is to eliminate raptor habitat requirements. Chimneys and other potential nesting areas can be fenced or closed to discourage nesting site use if nuisance situations persist. Similarly, farm animals can be placed in coops or sheltered pens and wire can be run above feeding areas to eliminate raptor attacks.

The use of pyrotechnics, scarecrows and increased human activity also are ways to reduce raptor problems. Scare pistols shot in the direction of these birds or a regularly moved scarecrow can create an illusion of danger and may deter any problematic raptors. Roosting problems also can be handled with similar tactics or by running wire along potential roosting areas.

Vultures, not considered raptors because of distinguishing biological characteristics, cause similar nuisance problems as raptors. Additional disturbances may include damage to boat seats or large numbers of roosting birds. Techniques such as habitat management and scare pistols can be used to minimize vulture disturbance.

