

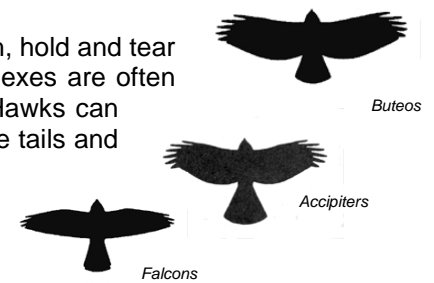
## Our Diurnal Birds of Prey



The Sutton Mountains massif and surrounding lowlands offer a great diversity of habitats for many birds of prey. Raptors, as they are often called, are very impressive but their behaviour is discrete and mysterious. The owl is the king of darkness. As night gives way to daylight, one can witness the outstanding flight performances of hawks and falcons, the two main groups of diurnal raptors.

### A highly distinctive profile

Hawks and falcons are recognized by their silent gliding style. Typically, they catch, hold and tear apart their prey with a strong hooked beak and powerful claws. Although both sexes are often similar, females are usually (and sometimes drastically) larger than the males. Hawks can be further divided in two subgroups: Buteos and Accipiters. Buteos, with their wide tails and broad wings can be distinguished from Accipiters which have longer tails but shorter and more agile wings. Long and pointed wings are characteristics of the falcon.



### Open spaces - a playground for flying acrobats

On a casual spring car ride, you might notice raptors hunting in the sky. The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*), slowly returning to many parts of Québec, has often been observed lately in the Bolton Pass. Slightly larger than a crow, there is no mistaking a falcon when it dives, hitting speeds of up to 200 kilometers per hour and killing its prey instantly.



American Kestrel  
(c) U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) is unique with its large wingspread, typical red tail and screeching *ke-e-e-r-r-r* call. Its nest is built in the woods but this hawk spends most of its time hunting small mammals in open fields. Hovering in mid-air, tail and wings wide open, the American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*), a “miniature Peregrine Falcon”, searches for rodents and insects harmful to humans. This small raptor nests in tree cavities and often sits straight and still, except for an occasional and quick shake of the tail, on top of a post or on a wire.



Young Peregrine Falcon  
(c) U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

### “Living on the edge”

Before the end of March, Cooper’s Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) and Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) come back north to breed. Quite rare, Cooper’s Hawk prefers old growth forest stands while the much more common Broad-winged Hawk lives in younger and denser woods. Accipiters will likely nest if conifers are abundant; this is especially true with pine stands for *Accipiter striatus*, the Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Those three species will often wander out of the forest. The high and clear descending whistle of the Broad-winged Hawk is commonly heard around forest openings or lakes where they hunt for shrews, mice or voles. Both species of *Accipiter* occasionally hang around houses, hoping to strike at their favourite preys around bird feeders. Scattered piles of feathers on the forest floor confirm the presence of *Accipiters*.

## Mysterious forest dwellers

Red-shouldered Hawk (c) Gérard Martineau



It is usually necessary to walk across dozens of hectares of forest to discover a Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) or a Red-shouldered Hawk (*Buteo lineatus*). The largest of the *Accipiter* group, the Goshawk lives here all year round and starts building its nest in March. This impressive bird needs a large territory to hunt birds, sometimes as big as a grouse, and medium size mammals. Generally rather discrete, it will almost always react loudly to someone standing too close to its nest and will often even attack the “undesirable” visitor!

For most of the year, the Red-shouldered Hawk is quiet but, when courtship begins, in March or early April, both sexes become loud and aggressive towards intruders. This medium size raptor prefers humid old growth forests situated at the bottom of slopes and on flatlands. Spring is beneficial to this species since it can add a supply of amphibians to its usual diet of small mammals.

## Threats and protection

The widespread use of pesticides between 1950 and 1980 caused a significant decline of many species of birds of prey. The situation has improved since the introduction of new regulations on the use of these products. Loss and destruction of habitat are now considered the major threats to the survival of these birds. It is therefore important to protect the impressive mosaic of fields, forests and mountains found in the Sutton region. Landowners can help the raptors by reducing the number of plantations and maintaining plant diversity within the woodlots.



Bird of prey nest (c) Clément Robidoux

Maintaining a high proportion of mature trees helps protect threatened species such as the Cooper's Hawk and Red-shouldered Hawk. It is also important to preserve the few remaining mature stands of pines and hemlocks to provide shelter and nests for these species. Drainage of wetlands is harmful to Red-shouldered Hawks while the presence of beavers improves the quality of their habitat. The creation of small openings around humid sites within the forest can also facilitate their hunting. During breeding and nesting season, avoid circulating within 200 meters of their habitats. From mid-march to mid-July, landowners should abstain from any type of forestry work. Since abandoned nests are often reutilized by other species, it would be preferable to leave them intact.

For information on measures to take in order to protect the habitat of the birds of prey or to find out about conservation tools available to landowners for the protection of natural habitats in perpetuity, please get in touch with your local conservation organisation or contact Appalachian Corridor by email [info@corridorappalachien.ca](mailto:info@corridorappalachien.ca) or by phone (450) 297-1145.

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*Appalachian Corridor is a conservation organisation with a mission to implement, in collaboration with Nature Conservancy Quebec and local conservation organisations, a transborder conservation strategy for the protection of a natural corridor extending from the Green Mountains of Vermont to Mount Orford, passing through the Sutton Mountains in the Eastern Townships. The following partners support Appalachian Corridor's global vision: Mount Echo Conservation Association, Association pour la conservation de la nature de Stukely-Sud, Ruiter Valley Land Trust, Parc d'environnement naturel de Sutton, Mount Pinnacle Land Trust, Alderbrooke Marsh Land Trust, Memphremagog Wetlands Foundation, Brome Lake Land Foundation, Société de conservation du corridor naturel de la rivière au Saumon, Conservation des vallons de la Serpentine, Société de protection foncière du lac Montjoie, Les Sentiers de l'Estrie, Conservation Espace Nature Shefford and Massawippi Conservation Trust.*