

## A SPECIMEN OF THE NORTHERN GOSHAWK FROM NORTH MISSISSIPPI

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The southern limit of the regular wintering range of the Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) in the Mississippi Valley has been recognized as including the northern half of Missouri and western Kentucky, but it "avoids the southeastern states" (Root, 1988). However, the species has been reported as a "rare winter visitor" to Arkansas (James and Neal 1986), a "rare migrant, very rare winter resident" in Tennessee (Robinson 1990) and "occasional in winter in north Alabama" (Imhof 1976). Whereas Robinson found only 5 records for west Tennessee before 1990, there have been an increasing number of records from that area, directly north of Mississippi, since 1989. Thus, it seemed inevitable that a confirmed occurrence in Mississippi should ensue to supplement a number of previously reported sightings.

Late on the afternoon of 10 March 1993, Judy Burkepile was returning to her home in Lafayette County, beyond the southwest city limits of Oxford, when a moderately large raptor crossed the road in front of her car. Its abnormal flight suggested a wing-injured bird. After stopping she was able to sight the bird a few meters into the woods and to identify it as an adult Northern Goshawk. That evening she reported this sighting to Marvin Davis and to Keith Meals.

Early the next morning, Burkepile, Davis, and Meals were at the scene and located the goshawk perched in a branch only one meter above the ground and four meters from the road. Meals proceeded to capture the bird, which flew about 10-15 meters at his approach, but was obviously unable to fly normally. Davis photographed the goshawk before and after its capture. Meals then took the bird to a local veterinarian for examination and treatment. Its obvious emaciation suggested that several days had passed since its injury.

An X-ray of the bird's wing confirmed a fractured humerus, which doubtless resulted from impact of a lead slug that was still imbedded in the tissues. Although reparative surgery was attempted, the goshawk did not recover from anesthesia.

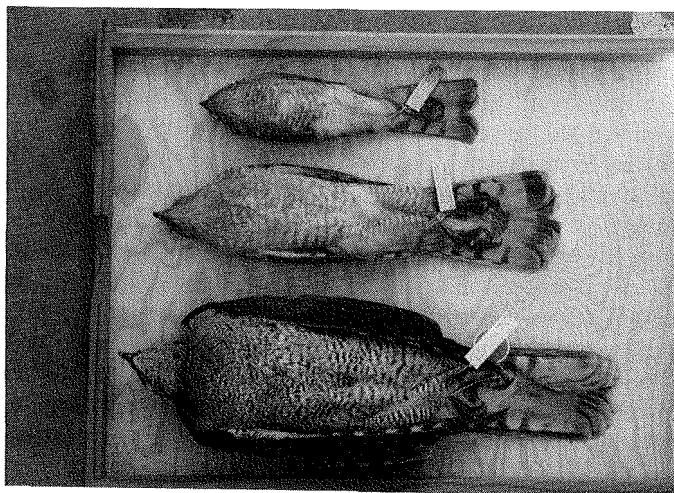
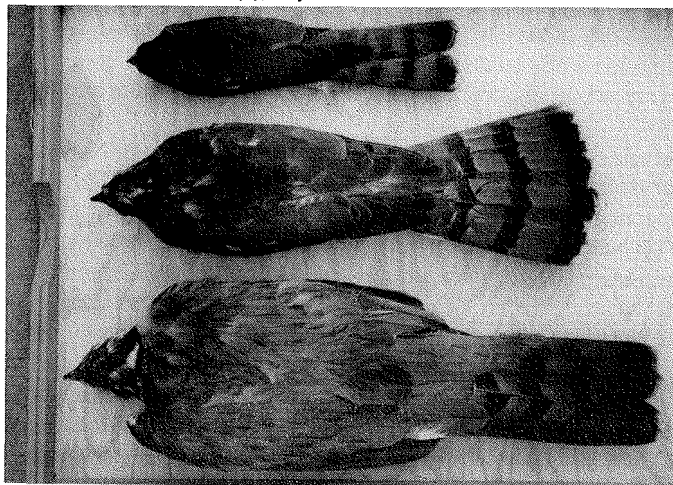
Meals conveyed the bird to the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science in Jackson to be deposited in the bird collection specimen # Ab-5372. It was identified by visual inspection of an ovary as a female. Photos were taken (Figures 1 and 2) to illustrate the specimen of Northern Goshawk, but also to contrast it with specimens of the related Sharp-shinned (*Accipiter striatus*) and Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*).

Comparison of the three Accipiters of the same sex shows the remarkable difference in size among them. However, it must be emphasized that the considerable size differential between sexes reduces the value of this factor for field identification. The small male of a larger species is not so different in size from the large female of the next smaller species. However, the adult plumage of the Northern Goshawk is distinctive, whereas those of the other two species are rather similar.

Sight records attributed to the Northern Goshawk have occurred mainly, but not exclusively, in north Mississippi. A bird described as ill or injured was reported by a hunter and located along a roadside near Sardis Waterfowl Refuge on 31 January 1984 by refuge manager Vic Theobald. The bird was identified in the hand. After being kept caged and fed for some days, the bird seemed recovered and was released. It was identified by its blue-gray back and light gray underparts plus a dark head mark as an adult Northern Goshawk. Unfortunately, no photo was obtained before the bird was released.

On 3 January 1986 Gene Knight and David Elmendorf were viewing birds at the Sardis Waterfowl Refuge when a large hawk flew directly at and over them, allowing a clear close sighting. The two agreed that it was an immature Northern Goshawk because of its brown upper plumage, heavily streaked underparts and barred tail in addition to shape and size. Elmendorf had prior experience with the species in the northern United States.

Another recent record was of a Northern Goshawk seen, on 29 March 1992 by Gene and Shannon Knight over the Yocona River bottomlands south of Oxford in Lafayette County (Schiefer 1993).



Figures 1 and 2. Dorsal and ventral views of (from top) Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawk and Northern Goshawk females in the collection at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science, Jackson.

Preceding these three sightings from Lafayette County was a report of an adult Northern Goshawk from the 29 December 1983 Hattiesburg, MS Christmas Bird Count by Terri Gates and Robert Chapel (Gates 1984). Chapel had prior familiarity with the species by virtue of residing in northern Illinois. Details were submitted to CBC regional editor T. Imhof of Alabama.

### Acknowledgments

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