



Sparrowhawk

(Accipiter nisus)

STATUS & ECOLOGY

The sparrowhawk, one of the most widespread and abundant raptors in Britain, is the archetypal predator of small woodland birds. Although current estimates suggest that there are around 1,400 breeding pairs in south east Scotland its numbers declined dramatically during the 1950s and 1960s as a result of organochlorine pesticide poisoning. Since the use of these chemicals was banned sparrowhawk numbers have recovered, re-colonisation of Edinburgh beginning in the 1980s. Between 1987 and 1989 a minimum of 26 used nests were found each year in the city and surrounding countryside. Indeed, recent studies have shown that the structure of Edinburgh's woodland and grassland habitats particularly favour the sparrowhawk's requirements, and makes the capital an important area for the bird.

Sparrowhawks prefer wooded habitat with trees spaced between 2-4 metres apart and conifers are favoured over deciduous trees for nest building. Although they prefer large woods in rural areas, Edinburgh's sparrowhawks seem to survive in small woodlands of between 2-4 hectares, usually one pair per small woodland. Female birds hunt over open ground more often than males, and take larger prey. Average broods are 4-5, and after four weeks fledglings disperse in all directions. Young males usually stay closer to their place of birth than females, and most sparrowhawks settle to breed in the general area in which they were reared.

The sparrowhawk is protected under the provisions of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, making it an offence to kill, injure or take any bird, or to destroy any egg or nest in use or being built.

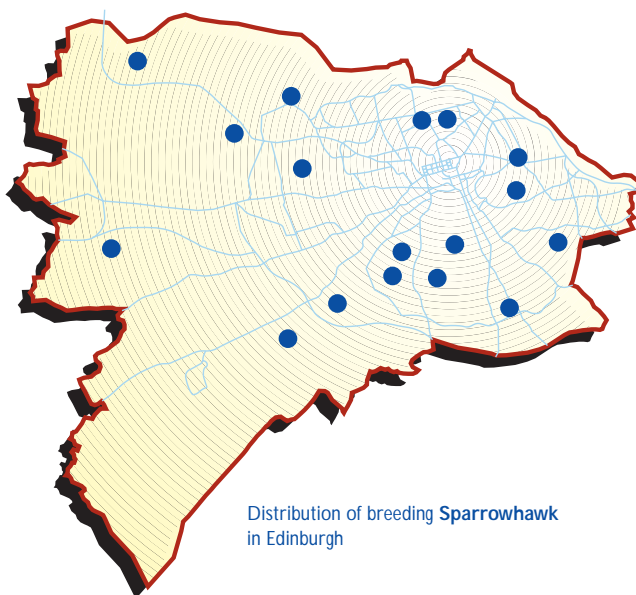
FACTORS CAUSING LOSS OR DECLINE

Impacts

Throughout this century the sparrowhawk has been heavily persecuted by pheasant-rearing gamekeepers. Allied to organochlorine poisoning this led to a massive drop in numbers between the 1950s and 1970s.

Threats

Although sparrowhawk numbers have recovered, habitat loss may be a threat to population levels. In particular, the loss of grassland to development may reduce hunting opportunities and is an increasing concern given the likely future loss of significant areas of greenbelt to the south and east of the city.



*"I sit in the top of the wood, my eyes closed.
Inaction, no falsifying dream
Between my hooked head and hooked feet,
Or in sleep rehearse perfect kills and eat"*

Ted Hughes

CURRENT ACTION

The sparrowhawk is identified by the UK Biodiversity Group as a “Species of Conservation Concern”, but no UK Action Plan is to be produced. There is no current action occurring in Edinburgh.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES & TARGETS

Objective

To retain a stable sparrowhawk population in Edinburgh at a level at or near the maximum which available habitat can support.

Targets

To survey and monitor Corstorphine Hill for the presence of sparrowhawk and raise awareness locally of the importance of the city for it's continued conservation.

Actions

Survey Corstorphine Hill for the presence and location of sparrowhawks from Winter 2001.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Council Recreation Department)

Produce a sparrowhawk conservation and monitoring strategy for the Hill by Autumn 2002.

(Actioned by: City of Edinburgh Recreation Department)

Key Contacts

City of Edinburgh Council (Recreation)

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CHAMPIONS

EDINBURGH
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

