

OTHER RAPTORS



Bald Eagle

This very large bird of prey can be seen in Delta throughout the year. Many overwinter and nest in Delta and then head north once the young have fledged to feed on the returning salmon runs along the coast. The mottled brown juveniles develop adult plumage at 5 years of age. Juveniles are often misidentified as Golden Eagles which are very rare here.

Turkey Vulture

These birds of summer are the Americas' most widespread vulture, ranging from southern Canada to Tierra del Fuego. The Turkey Vulture is a scavenger and feeds almost exclusively on carrion. It finds its food using its keen eyes and amazing sense of smell. In flight, it takes advantage of thermals, flapping its wings infrequently. It is more common on the Gulf Islands than in Delta.

Northern Harrier

A ground nesting, resident raptor, with distinctive white rump visible in flight. It flies low to "harry" prey such as small mammals and birds and can be seen hovering. This common resident is seen year-round over marshy areas and fields, especially around Boundary Bay. The brown female is larger than the light grey male, which is sometimes called a "Grey Ghost". During courtship, the male often delivers rodents to the female and transfers the food in a mid-flight routine, as shown in the second photo, where the female has just received a vole. This event is usually accompanied by characteristic calling.

Osprey

The Osprey is a large, exclusively fish-eating raptor with a wingspan of 180 cm. It is brown above and light below with dark elbows on its wings and a facial mask. It is resident or migrant on all continents except Antarctica. It is not very common in the Fraser Delta, but it can be seen seasonally. It generally tolerates a wide variety of habitats and nests in any location near a body of water providing an adequate food supply.

ACCIPITERS (TRUE HAWKS)



Sharp-shinned Hawk

The raptor that swoops into your backyard to hunt birds at your feeder is likely an accipiter, with short, rounded wings and a long tail. Size is an important differentiator for species as their colours are similar. Accipiters typically make several wing flaps followed by a short glide, as they fly silently through the trees.



This small, robin-sized, accipiter, also known as a Sharpie, is similar to the Cooper's Hawk, but has a smaller head and pencil-thin legs. Blue grey above and pale rufous below, in flight the small head gives it an "T" shaped silhouette while the Cooper's silhouette is more like a cross. Adult eyes are dark red to orange, and in juveniles they are yellow to pale orange.



Cooper's Hawk

This crow-sized accipiter with a long tail has a large, dark-capped head. Adults' wings and back are blue grey above and checkered rufous below. Juveniles have thin dark streaking on a white chest. Females are larger than the males. Eyes are yellow in juveniles and darken to red by their third year. Wings are rounded and relatively short, facilitating their flight through woodlands where they prey on birds from doves to American Robins.



American Goshawk

This is the largest of the accipiter hawks in North America and a rare winter visitor to Delta, where the leftmost photo was taken in Boundary Bay. It has the typical accipiter flight pattern of flaps followed by a glide, and feeds on small birds and mammals in woodland and shrubby areas. Previously thought to be the same as the Eurasian Goshawk, it was separated in 2023 based on genetic differences.

FALCONS



American Kestrel

This widespread falcon of North America is the smallest member of this group and has sexually dimorphic plumage, with the male being the more colourful. Females are larger than males. They are ambush hunters of insects, mice, lizards, and small birds. Kestrels are not very common in the Fraser estuary as they tend to prefer drier habitats.

Merlin

This falcon is larger and darker than the American Kestrel, and much more common in the Fraser Estuary, especially in winter. It is heavily streaked below and has dark eyes. It is smaller than a crow and flies extremely fast as it chases after shorebirds. The Pacific form of this species is known as the Black Merlin.



Peregrine Falcon

The supreme member of the falcon family, the Peregrine's long, pointed wings help it dive at high speed during the stoop, making it the fastest bird in the world. Its distinctive dark moustache stands out against a whitish bib and dark grey upper parts. Its prey is other birds such as migratory shorebirds. This falcon is found year round in the Fraser Delta but is particularly noticeable when large numbers of shorebirds are present in winter and during migration seasons.

BUTEOS (BROAD-WINGED HAWKS)



Red-tailed Hawk

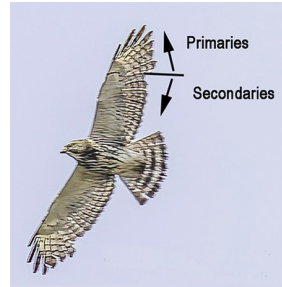
Found throughout North America, this largest member of the Buteo is the most common hawk in North America and also in Delta. They are often seen on roadside fence posts or power poles, particularly during the winter. It has broad, rounded wings with dark bars on the leading edges and a short tail that is banded in juveniles and red in adults.



The head is usually dark, and some birds have a belly band. There are 14 sub-species that vary in range and appearance, 7 of these occur north of Mexico and they range in colour from almost white to very dark. They mate for life and females are larger than males.



Adult (above) with dark head and leading edge of the wing and juvenile (right) showing their characteristic tail banding and streaked patterning. In young birds, the primaries and secondaries are easily differentiated.



Rough-legged Hawk

This medium-large raptor is found in Arctic regions of North America, Europe, and Russia during the breeding season. It is a winter visitor in Delta and can be seen hunting primarily for small mammals along the foreshore fields and marshes. In flight it shows dark wrist patches on white wings and it is one of the few large birds of prey to hover regularly while hunting.



BIRD BANDING

This juvenile Red-tailed Hawk has a wing tag T-9 that can be seen as it flies or when perched. It will also have a metal leg band, with an identification number. Such tag numbers should be reported with location seen and any other

information, to the North American Bird Banding Program that is jointly run by the USA and Canada. Bands are sometimes coloured with large numbers and can be on leg(s), wing(s), or neck (geese). The Whooping Crane (right) with coloured bands, a tracking transmitter, and numbered leg band, was identified and has its own web page that is updated annually.



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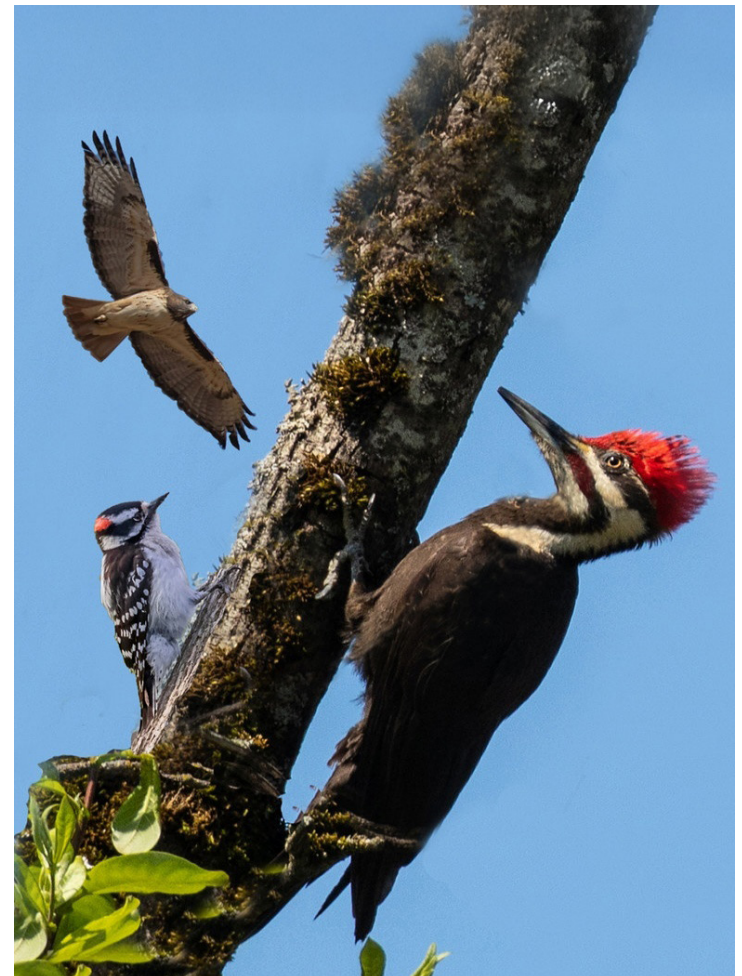
Delta

Raptors & Woodpeckers in Delta

Raptors are birds of prey that have excellent eyesight, curved or hooked bills, and strong sharp talons. All raptors are carnivores and most are excellent hunters. There are 7 types of raptors of which 6 are seen in Delta: eagles, hawks (of two types: accipiters and buteos), owls, falcons, vultures, and osprey. The seventh type, kites, are seldom seen locally.

Our local woodpeckers range in size from the Downy at 15cm to the Pileated at 45cm. They tend to be solitary but do travel in pairs and appear dark on the back and light below, with males often showing red on the head. Most woodpeckers are resident although some flickers and sapsuckers migrate. They have chisel-like bills, a long tongue, and toes arranged in an X shape (zygodactyl).

Identification of individual species of raptors and woodpeckers can be enhanced by knowing their relative size, and how they use their wings in flight. This brochure provides some key characteristics of flight and silhouettes useful for identification.



Flight Pattern of Woodpeckers and Raptors

Raptors and woodpeckers both have flight characteristics that can be helpful in grouping them. The woodpecker’s flight tends to be direct, not wandering, and it has an undulating or rhythmic pattern to it, as it takes a few beats of its wings and then folds them flat against the body, before making another short sequence of flaps. Raptors on the other hand can be subdivided into three main groups based on flight behaviours.

Buteos (Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks) with broad wings and fan-shaped tails tend to soar high, riding the thermals and seldom flapping their wings. Eagles and vultures also exhibit this flight characteristic but can be distinguished by size. For the Turkey Vulture, the naked head and shallow V-shape positioning of the wings while soaring is characteristic.

Accipiters (Cooper’s and Sharp-shinned Hawks) tend to fly low and fast. The shorter wings and long narrow tails give them the agility needed to pursue birds through trees and bushes. When not pursuing prey they tend to flap several times and then glide.

Species in the genus Falco have long, pointed wings. Locally, this group includes Peregrine Falcon, American Kestrel and Merlin.

Flight Pattern of Woodpeckers and Raptors

Raptors are often seen as silhouettes soaring high and their wing shapes and flight characteristics can help in identification.

Consider :

- 1. The size and shape
- 2. Colours
- 3. Flight patterns
- 4. Season and habitat

The graphic below (modified from the West County Hawk Watch pamphlet) is not to scale but gives silhouettes and relative sizes within the groups. Remember that female raptors are often larger than males.

BALD

EAGLES

GOLDEN

VULTURE

TURKEY VULTURE

OSPREY

HARRIERS

Male

Female

BUTEO

RED-TAILED HAWK

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK

ACIPITERS

NORTHERN GOSHAWK

COOPER'S HAWK

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK

FALCON

Female

Male

AMERICAN KESTREL

MERLIN

PEREGRINE

OWL



American Kestrel pair with male on the right (above)



Above: Bald Eagles with mature adult above and juvenile below. The white adult plumage develops in their fifth year.



Northern Harrier pestering a Common Raven.

WOODPECKERS



Downy Woodpecker

This smallest of the North American woodpeckers is black and white, with a red hind-crown patch on males. Found locally year-round, it can be well camouflaged in woodlands where it feeds on insects and seeds. Listen for its distinctive “pik” and rattle calls. A cavity nester, it lays up to 7 eggs which are incubated by both parents. In juveniles the red is on the front of the head.



Hairy Woodpecker

A medium-sized woodpecker with a large bill nearly as long as its head. Males have red patches on the back of the head that are lacking on the female. The plumage is almost identical to Downy Woodpeckers, so their larger size and longer bill are the best field marks to differentiate these two species. The Hairy is less common than the Downy in residential areas and their drumming is slower paced.

Northern Flicker

The Northern Flicker is a common resident woodpecker native to North America. It feeds on the ground and nests in snags. It is one of the few woodpecker species to migrate. Flickers are divided between eastern (yellow-shafted) and western (red-shafted) populations by the Rocky Mountains. Red-shafted birds are the most commonly seen flickers in Delta. Each population has unique migratory pathways, often merging at the southern wintering sites.



Pileated Woodpecker

These impressive birds are black with a red crest and a white line down the sides of the throat. The Pileated Woodpecker is the largest woodpecker in North America and the third largest in the world. About 60% of their diet consists of carpenter ants. They tend to mate for life and do not migrate, staying in the same territory year-round. Their flight is strong and undulating, and they show white on the wings when they fly. Their very loud, rattling calls, are somewhat similar to the Northern Flicker.



Red-breasted Sapsucker

A western species, breeding from southeast Alaska to northern California, the Red-breasted Sapsucker requires living trees for food. They visit the same tree multiple times, drilling holes in neat horizontal rows and returning later when the sap has started flowing. The tongue of the Red-breasted Sapsucker is covered with short, coarse hairs. This adaptation makes it easier for the bird to collect sap. The insects attracted to the sap are also consumed, not only by sapsuckers but also by warblers and hummingbirds, particularly in early Spring.

OWLS



Barn Owl

This crow-sized owl has a characteristic “heart-shaped” face with dark eyes, long wings and a short tail. They may be seen at dusk or in early morning but hunt primarily at night. In the dark, they appear white, although they are beige to grey above and white with dark speckles below. These owls are efficient predators of voles and mice that cause crop damage, so are beneficial to local farmers.



Short-eared Owl

Owls are raptors as they have hooked claws and feed on other animals and birds. Unlike hawks that are diurnal and feed during the day, most owls are primarily nocturnal. Short-eared Owls, however, often hunt in winter over coastal marshes during the day. Their soft wing feathers help them fly silently over reed beds and grass, unheard by their rodent prey.



Great Horned Owl

Look for this resident owl in mature trees where they roost during the day. It is mostly dark brown with large ear tufts. It swallows all but the largest prey items whole. The bones, fur, and feathers are then regurgitated in the form of pellets. These pellets can sometimes be found at the base of trees. The young owlets develop independence by first “branching” around the nest.



Barred Owl

This owl is native to eastern North America but expanded its range to the west coast. They are tolerant of urban areas and their diet consists mainly of small mammals, as well as birds, reptiles and amphibians. They raise relatively small broods, often in a tree hollow. Barred Owls are considered invasive as they prey on other owls, including the now very rare Spotted Owl.



Snowy Owl

The Snowy Owl is a predominantly Arctic region bird, that usually visits Delta in small numbers. When unpredictable irruptions occur and large numbers are seen in Boundary Bay, many of them are heavily barred younger birds. The face is white in all plumages, but only mature males are all white. Snowy Owls will hunt during the day and night; do not disturb them when resting as this can impact their ability to survive.



Northern Saw-whet Owl

This is the smallest northern owl species in North America, about the size of a Robin. They nest in tree cavities and are preyed upon by larger birds of prey. The Northern Saw-whet Owl migrates south in winter and can be found most winters at Reifel Bird Sanctuary. Although nocturnal, it may hunt small mammals in early evening or morning. It roosts during the day at eye level or below in holly trees and other evergreens.