



American kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) adults: male (left), female (right)

CO-EXISTING WITH RAPTORS

Raptors are birds of prey, such as hawks, owls, and falcons, and many have adapted well to living in urban areas. Living in close proximity to people has led to an increase in encounters between people and raptors. Many people are unfamiliar with the biology of these birds and may unknowingly respond to their presence in ways that can have negative impacts for the birds, the people, or both. The three most commonly reported raptor-related concerns are aggressive raptors protecting their young; raptors attacking small domestic animals; and people “rescuing” young fledging raptors found on the ground.

This fact sheet provides advice to help you coexist with these ecologically important birds of prey.

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RAPTORS

- Raptors are carnivorous birds that hunt and eat other small animals.
- Raptors have hooked beaks, sharp talons and excellent eyesight.
- Raptors are protected under The Wildlife Act of Manitoba.
- Raptors can perceive people as a potential threat to their young, especially when people are moving quickly near the nest.



Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) fledglings



Cooper's hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) adult

THINGS YOU CAN DO TO REDUCE THE RISK OF CONFLICT

Reducing risks to people

Aggression from raptors towards humans is extremely rare. Chances are, if you encounter an aggressive raptor during spring or early summer, it is simply trying to protect its young. Aggressive behaviour typically includes screeching and swooping at the perceived threat. Use these tips to reduce your risk of a negative encounter with a raptor:

- Heed raptor threat calls and try to avoid the immediate vicinity of an active nest for 3-4 weeks.
- If activity near an active nest is unavoidable, protect yourself; wear a hat, sunglasses, and carry an umbrella. Walk in the area; don't run or bike. Use a tarp or canopy tent to help shield a yard or walkway.
- Don't do anything to harm a raptor or its active nest. Raptors, and their active nests, are protected by The Wildlife Act of Manitoba.
- Contact a conservation officer to report aggressive raptors that are active in a public area where warning signs are not already present. A conservation officer is your best source for information related to aggressive raptors.

In the majority of cases, an aggressive raptor will stop the aggressive behaviour once all its young have fledged (developed flight capability) and left the nest area. In general, you can assume one month from egg hatch to fledging, and another 2- 4 weeks until the young leave the area completely.

To decrease risk for small pets and livestock, ensure their outdoor structures are fully enclosed.



Swainson's hawk (Buteo swainsoni) adult with fledgling

Reducing risks to domestic animals

Raptors are birds of prey, and their prey can include small pets as well as small livestock, such as chickens. Use these tips to help protect your domestic animals:

- Don't leave small pets or livestock, particularly under five kilograms (10 pounds) exposed outside; supervise them or keep them in a fully enclosed protected area when outdoors. Bring pets and poultry indoors from dusk to dawn. Mitigating possible issues is key.
- Remove bird feeders, and anything that might provide food or shelter for small animals, from April to November. These small animals are an attractive food source for raptors.

FINDING YOUNG BIRDS ON THE GROUND

If you find a baby bird on the ground that appears to be alone and unable to fly well, do not assume that it requires your help. First, determine if it is a nestling or fledgling.

If the baby bird is sparsely feathered, and unable to hop, walk, or flit about, it's a nestling and the nest is likely nearby. If you can find the nest, put the bird back as quickly as possible. Don't worry about your scent, the parents will not abandon their young if touched by a person. If the nestling feels cold to your touch, warm it in your hands before returning it to the nest. Returning a cold bird to the nest could cause a parent to push it out in order to protect the other warm eggs and/or young.



Great horned owl (Bubo virginianus) nestling

Most of the baby birds found by people are fledglings. Fledglings are fully feathered and capable of hopping, walking or flitting about. These are young birds that have just left the nest, are still under the care of their parents, and do not need help from people. This is part of the natural process of learning how to fly.

During summer, it's not unusual to find a fledgling raptor out of the nest and on the ground. This is not a cause for concern. Many young raptors at this stage will practice "nest jumping". Before taking their first flight, younger raptors move onto branches around their nest, often flapping their wings repeatedly to develop their flight muscles, and will sometimes fall. A raptor fledgling's parents will continue to feed and protect it on the ground and encourage it to hop back up the tree or fly.

If you encounter a fledging raptor on the ground, follows these tips to ensure you don't cause more harm than good:

- Don't pick up the bird and take it to a rehabilitation center. Unless the raptor is suffering from obvious injuries, it is a disservice to both the bird and rehab centres to "rescue" it. Rehab centres are far less capable than the raptor's parents in teaching it how to fly and catch prey. By bringing a healthy bird to a rehab centre, you will reduce its chances of survival and create an unnecessary burden on the centre, directing limited resources away from wildlife truly in need of help.

- If you're unsure, call a conservation officer or a wildlife rehabilitation centre and describe the situation; they can advise you on how to respond.
- Only if the bird is in immediate danger (i.e. in the path of vehicles or other traffic), should you try to put the bird back in the tree. Otherwise, the best thing to do is leave the bird in place.

THE VITAL ROLE OF RAPTORS

Raptors play an important role in keeping our ecosystems and communities healthy. They provide ecosystem services such as keeping pigeon and rodent populations in check and scavenging on the carcasses of dead animals, and thereby helping to prevent disease from spreading. As top predators, raptors act as an indicator for the overall health of an area. Healthy raptor populations are important in maintaining an environment that sustains both people and wildlife.



Peregrine falcon (Falco peregrinus) fledgling

For more information on reducing the risk of conflicts with raptors and other wildlife, visit www.manitoba.ca/human-wildlife.

To report wildlife showing aggressive behaviour, or that appears sick, injured, or orphaned, contact a conservation officer at the local district office or call the TIP line at 1-800-782-0076.