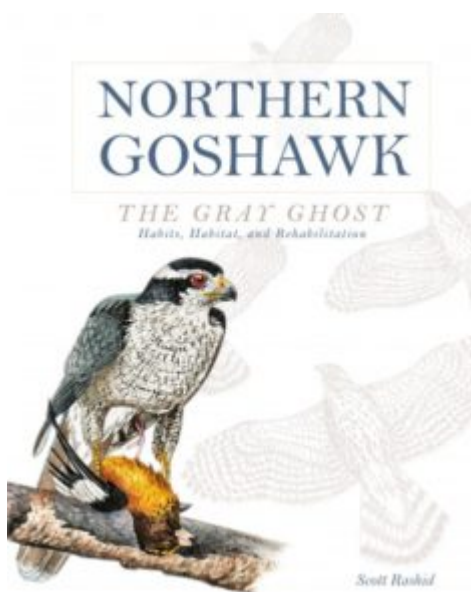


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Book of the Month – Northern Goshawk: The Gray Ghost – Evergreen Audubon

5-6 minutes



After reviewing the tale of Mabel, the Goshawk, in *H is for Hawk*, I decided it was time to learn more about Goshawks. A few years ago, a Northern Goshawk was the first bird of the year at our feeders in Soda Creek, appearing on January 1. From time to time we see a gray ghost land on a Ponderosa Pine with a clear view of the bird feeders. The feeder birds either fly off in a panic or freeze.

Scott Rashid has been studying Northern Goshawks in and around Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP) since 1998. He

conducts research on raptors and rehabilitates injured birds. He is director of the [Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute \(CARRI\)](#). Rashid's 2016 book on the Northern Goshawk follows his earlier books on Small Mountain Owls and The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study.

Compared with *H is for Hawk*, Rashid's account is rather "matter of fact." He explains the Goshawk's anatomy, comparing it with two other Accipiters, the Cooper's Hawk and the Sharp-shinned Hawk. He discusses the hawk's vocalizations, courtship, hunting and food habits, nesting, nestlings, and fledging, giving the reader a detailed portrait of the woodland predator.

Fascinated by Goshawks since high school, Rashid describes the intense aggression that the Goshawk exhibits, whether hunting for prey or defending its young. Apparently, he has been attacked frequently enough that he has learned to hold his tripod over his head when he attempts to observe nesting birds.

They are equally relentless while hunting. Their prey includes nearly every kind of bird found in RMNP, including Gray Jays, Steller's Jay, Mountain Chickadee, American Robins, Clark's Nutcrackers, Ptarmigan, Dusky Grouse, and more. They also favor squirrels of all types. And they are not averse to hunting domestic chickens and waterfowl.

The Goshawks maneuverability is legendary. We have witnessed them spiraling up the trunk of a Ponderosa in pursuit of a bird, amazingly missing every horizontal branch in their path.

Rashid describes the Goshawk's tendency to place its stick nest near meadows and hiking trails, although these are obviously

nests they are easier for a researcher to locate. He surmises that they use the trails as paths back to their nests and the open meadows as opportunities to hunt ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, and other small mammals.

In 2011, Rashid was investigating a report of a large hawk attacking hikers along a trail in the national park. As he approaches the area, he hears the familiar aggressive call: kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak, of the female. She is defending the two downy chicks in her nest. Then, she is joined by the male, whose kak-kak-kak-kak-kak-kak is deeper.

The male flies toward Rashid, carrying a golden mantled ground squirrel. Surprisingly, the male drops the squirrel nearly on top of Rashid, as if on a bombing run toward a target. He moves away to get a photo. When he returns to the spot, the squirrel is gone. The male Goshawk had returned to pick it up so that he could deliver it to his waiting mate.

One of the benefits of reading *The Gray Ghost* are the photographs. Clearly, Rashid is able to get close to the hawks and their nests. He has fantastic shots of male and female adults, nestlings, and juveniles. He noticed Gray Jays harassing fledglings, that is until the adults appeared. The jays appeared to station a lookout that gave out a warning call to its friends.

Northern Goshawks apparently have few predators. First among those is the Great Horned Owl. Rashid find nestlings and juveniles that have been taken by owls. He also reports on accounts of fishers and raccoons taking Goshawk nestlings.

Rashid ends his account by describing his experience

rehabilitating Goshawks that have been injured or stricken with the West Nile virus. Because of their aggressive nature, they are difficult to handle during rehabilitation. But, they also survive and recover and are happily released back to the wild.

If you would like to know more about one of our local birds, although rarely seen, I recommend *The Gray Ghost*. The photographs alone are worth the price. It might even be possible to meet Scott Rashid on location in Rocky Mountain National Park. He does an occasional program, often through the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies.

Have you read this book? We'd love to hear your comments and feedback below!

Review submitted by JoAnn Hackos

Northern Goshawk, Schiffer Publishing, Atglen, PA, 2015.