

**Ornithology. Raptors:** Discovering Raptors: From Field to Aviary

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**Week One:** July 5 – 11, 2026

**Schedule:** Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30, except Wednesday afternoon.

**Location:** Frank Morrison Hall, room 174 with some field work at Raptor Barn, Game Farm  
Road

# Raptors of New York

❖ A SAMPLER ❖



NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT  
OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

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## American Kestrel (top)

A robin-sized falcon, frequently perches on power lines and hovers over fields or grassy areas where it hunts insects, small mammals and birds, reptiles and amphibians. Reaches lengths up to 11", with wingspan of up to 24". Two vertical dark streaks on the side of the face resemble a mustache and a sideburn. Males have rusty backs, blue wings and bright rufous tails with a broad, dark band near the tip. Females are reddish brown and barred above. Both sexes lightly streaked and spotted below. Nests in cavities. Migrates. Most common and widely-dispersed raptor in New York.

## Merlin (bottom)

A larger than blue jay-sized stocky, aggressive and quick falcon. Up to 12" long, with a wingspan of up to 27". Adult males are blue-gray above, lighter and more finely streaked below. Females and immatures are dark brown above, with heavy streaks on the underparts and a white throat. All have pale mustache marks and many narrow white tail bands. Nests in trees at forest edges in the Adirondacks, most often in conifers using old bird or squirrel nests, broken tree tops or cavities. Seen regularly as a migrant in the fall along the coast where they often harass other birds.



## Peregrine Falcon

A swift falcon with long pointed wings, the crow-sized peregrine hunts birds in open areas. Nests on bridges and tall buildings in urban areas. Also found on cliffs in the Adirondacks and occasionally in the Hudson Valley. Reaches lengths up to 18", with a wingspan up to 46". Adults are gray above and barred below with a white chest and throat. Immatures are brown above and streaked below with a buff-colored chest and throat. Distinctive dark cheek patches below the eyes. Vocal and aggressive near the nest which is in a depression. Restoration programs by DEC and others resulted in a dramatic comeback after pesticide-induced decline. Seen during migration at hawk lookouts and on Long Island, often migrating in pairs.



### Osprey

Large fish-eating raptor often seen hovering over large water bodies like rivers, lakes and ocean bays. Dives feet first, sometimes totally submerging itself underwater in pursuit of its prey. Up to 26" long, with a wingspan of up to 67". Dark brown upper parts except for a white crown and throat separated by a dark stripe. Underside of the body white, with alternating dark and light areas on the underwing. Immatures have buff-tipped feathers; adult females have a streaked necklace on the upper chest. Distinct gull-like crook in the wing in flight. Large stick nests are in trees or on platforms on Long Island, in the Adirondacks, St. Lawrence Valley, with a few scattered in the central and southwestern parts of the state. Migrates to Central and South America.



### Cooper's Hawk (top)

Crow-sized forest hawk that looks like a hefty version of the sharp-shinned hawk, but with a larger head and a rounder tail with a broader white band. Adult Cooper's hawks blue-gray above with rufous underparts. Immatures are brown with finer streaking underneath. Up to 19" long, with a wingspan of up to 34". Eats birds and some small mammals, sometimes appearing at backyard bird feeders to consume the avian visitors. Nests have been found in forests in most parts of the state. Mainly solitary; less common on migration than sharp-shinned hawks.

### Sharp-shinned Hawk (bottom)

Quick, dove-sized forest hawk with short, broad wings, a slim body, and a long tail. Adult sharpies are slaty-blue gray above with rusty orange underparts and a banded, usually square-tipped tail. Immatures brown with heavy streaking below. Up to 13" long, with a wingspan of up to 26". Rapid wing beats interspersed with periodic glides in flight. Rare to uncommon resident, increasing in winter. Feeds on small birds; often seen chasing birds at backyard feeders. Inconspicuous woodland nests, generally in conifers. Sometimes seen in large numbers at hawk lookouts on the interior ridges and on the coast; often harass other raptors.



### Northern Goshawk

Uncommon, large, woodland hawk known for its aggression near its nest. Makes loud calls and dives on intruders who approach its nest. Up to 24" long, with a wingspan of up to 45". Adults have blue-gray backs and pale gray underparts. Immatures brown with heavy streaking underneath. All have a broad white stripe above the eye and fluffy white feathers under the long, broad tail. Powerful hunters that feed on mammals and birds. Undergo a cyclical migration tied to prey availability. Bulky stick nests, placed in conifers or hardwoods, occasionally in suburban areas, but more often found in more extensive forests. Same nesting area is often used year after year.



**Broad-winged Hawk** (top)

Small, stout, somewhat tame woodland hawk, about the size of a crow. Known for its spectacular annual fall migrations to Central and South America, during which groups of thousands can be seen at hawk lookouts. Feathered legs. Up to 17" long, with a wingspan of up to 36". Adults have broad black and white tail bands; immatures brown above, creamy below and heavily streaked on the face, throat, sides and belly. Preys on insects, frogs, snakes, salamanders, toads, small mammals and a few birds. Breeds statewide in forested areas; rare in winter.

**Red-shouldered Hawk** (bottom)

Forest-dwelling, medium-sized hawk, smaller and slimmer than a red-tailed hawk, with long, narrower wings. Up to 19" long, with a wingspan of up to 42". Chestnut-colored body and underwings, narrow black and white stripes on its tail and reddish shoulder patches. Immatures brown above, cream-colored below with heavy uniform streaking on the chest. In flight, a crescent-shaped translucent "window" just inside the wingtips where light passes through. Prey includes insects, reptiles, rodents and small birds. Nests in bottomland hardwoods, flooded deciduous swamps and upland mixed forest. Rare in winter.



**Red-tailed Hawk**

New York's most common hawk, the large, sturdy "red-tail" is often seen soaring over fields, perched in trees or on top of power poles along highways. Up to 22" long, with a wingspan of up to 56". Brown to gray-brown above and light below with variable streaking and generally a dark belly band on a white chest. Adults have the rufous red tail, immatures have a brown tail. All have a dark leading edge to the wing when viewed from underneath. Sometimes hover when hunting their prey of small mammals and birds. An adaptable species that places its bulky stick nests high up in trees adjacent to open fields, occasionally in wooded swamps and marshes. Some birds are year-round residents. Uncommon in winter.



**Northern Harrier** (top)

Lean, narrow-winged, owl-faced raptor often flies low over fields or marshes, tilting from side to side, occasionally hovering before it drops on its prey of mice, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians. Up to 20" long, with a wingspan of up to 48". Adult males are silver-gray above, white below with black wing tips. Females and immatures are brown above and buffy below, with immatures less streaked below and a rich orange to cinnamon color. All have a large white rump patch at the base of a long tail. Wings often held uplifted in a V. Nests on the ground in wet areas or hay-fields, sometimes in small colonies. Uncommon in winter.

**Rough-legged Hawk** (bottom)

Large, boldly marked soaring hawk generally seen during migration or in the winter in open fields and marshes. Not a breeding bird in New York. Often hovers while hunting small mammals and occasional birds. Up to 23" long, with a wingspan of up to 56". Two color phases, but underneath all show blackish carpal patches and silvery flight feathers; most have a dark belly patch. Light-phase birds have brown backs, a light crown and a white tail except for a broad, dark band at the tip. Dark-phase birds have black bodies and black underwing linings (at the front of the wing), which contrast with the silvery flight feathers.

### Turkey Vulture

Large, gregarious carrion-feeding raptor, the turkey vulture grows up to 28" long, with a wingspan up to 71". Dark except from below, when the trailing edge of the wing looks silver, contrasting with the black underparts and the gray tail. Adults have unfeathered red heads and yellow-white bills; immatures have naked gray heads and gray bills. Wings are generally held in a deep V; often rocks in flight, rarely flapping. Nests in trees, caves, thickets and old buildings. The smaller, less common black vulture with a short, stubby tail sometimes is seen in southeastern New York.



### Golden Eagle

A large, dark eagle with a golden head and back of neck. The white plumage of the immature golden is restricted to the tail and the base of the flight feathers. Grows up to 33" long, with a wingspan of up to 87". Feeds on mammals and birds, preferring open country for hunting, but also found near wetlands. Franklin Mountain in Oneonta is a premier eagle site in the U.S. Also seen in the Adirondacks and winters in southern New York. While soaring, wings are held flat or in moderate V, flight is steady.



All artwork by Jean Gawalt

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### Bald Eagle

On the brink of extirpation from New York State, this bird was successfully reestablished in the state through DEC's restoration program. Frequently associated with large lakes and rivers, it feeds primarily on fish and waterfowl. A large massive, long-winged raptor, it measures up to 35" long, with a wingspan of up to 89". Young bird is dark brown with varying amounts of white. The white head and tail occur at about four years of age. Breeds near water, building nests in very large trees (often white pines) in areas of low human disturbance. Winters throughout New York. Wings held flat in flight.