Proning Behavior in Cooper’s Hawks (Accipiter cooperii)

Key Words: Cooper's Hawk; Accipiter cooperii; fledglings; group behavior; post-fledging; proning.

We here introduce a new term, proning, to name and describe an apparently undocumented behavior in post-fledging Cooper's Hawks (Accipiter cooperii). We note the group aspect of this behavior in some cases and relate this phenomenon to the challenge of locating fledgling hawks during studies of the reproductive rate of this species and possibly of other raptors.

We observed fledglings well capable of flight in prone positions (i.e., proning), that is, lying with their whole bodies (tails included) along the axis of tree limbs or on the ground. The head of the proning bird is raised above the body, although we have observed proning fledglings with their heads lying on branches, apparently sleeping (eyelids closed; Fig. 1). When the proning bird was in a tree, its wings were sometimes offset from its sides, as if to grasp the branch (perhaps to secure contact) when the limb was only about as wide as the bird’s body (Fig. 1). We have not detected vocalizations by proning birds.

Our observations stem from a 34-yr ongoing study of breeding Cooper’s Hawks in Wisconsin in which we routinely make at least two visits to each nest, one or more to determine the presence of an incubating bird and another visit during which we climb to nests to count the number of young that have reached at least 18 d of age (or 70% of fledging age, ca. 25 d), to record brood size, and to band young (Rosenfield et al. 2007b, 2013). We opportunistically visit some nest sites after young have fledged to trap adult birds and collect habitat data (e.g., Bielefeldt et al. 1998, Rosenfield et al. 1996, Trexel et al. 1999). During one 3-yr consecutive period, RNR routinely conducted another nest visit of about a maximum of 30 min to determine the number of fledged young (ca. 30–40 d old). During one of these visits, RNR first observed proning by a fledgling in a nest tree (nest extant).

LES made his observations of proning during daily and opportunistic observations of a brood of four fledglings (one male, three females) near an urban nest in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 2013. LES's observations were facilitated by the relatively easy detection of young permitted by the sparse tree and shrub cover of this urban landscape.

During all hours of daylight, LES observed both male and female fledglings proning in the nest tree and in two