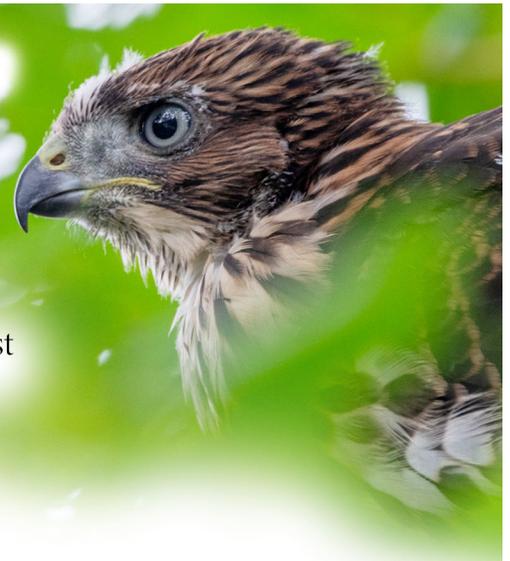




2025 Seattle Cooper's Hawk Project: Annual Report



The 2025 Cooper's hawk nesting season kept us jumping from March 1st to early September. Coops are already the most common raptor in Seattle, and this year their population increased yet again.

The Coop Season by the Numbers

76 nest-building pairs
(record high, previous high 69)

- 6 pairs failed to lay
- 6 failed during incubation
- 2 failed after hatch

62 pairs fledged young (previous high 55)
220 fledglings (previous high 200)
3.55 fledglings per successful nest
46 fledglings and 20 adults banded

Cooper's hawk pairs love Seattle parks for suitable nesting trees. Of the 76 nest locations in 2025, 44 were in Seattle parks and greenbelts, 30 on private property, and two in cemeteries.

Coops continue to strongly favor nesting in bigleaf maple trees (22 nests), followed by Douglas fir (15), white pine (15), and madrona (6). They added two new species, poplar and Siberian elm, to the long list of tree species used for nesting.



Nestling killed by crows
(Giuliano Wrobel)

Top & bottom: Juvenile Cooper's hawks (John Gossman)

A Second Murder by Crows

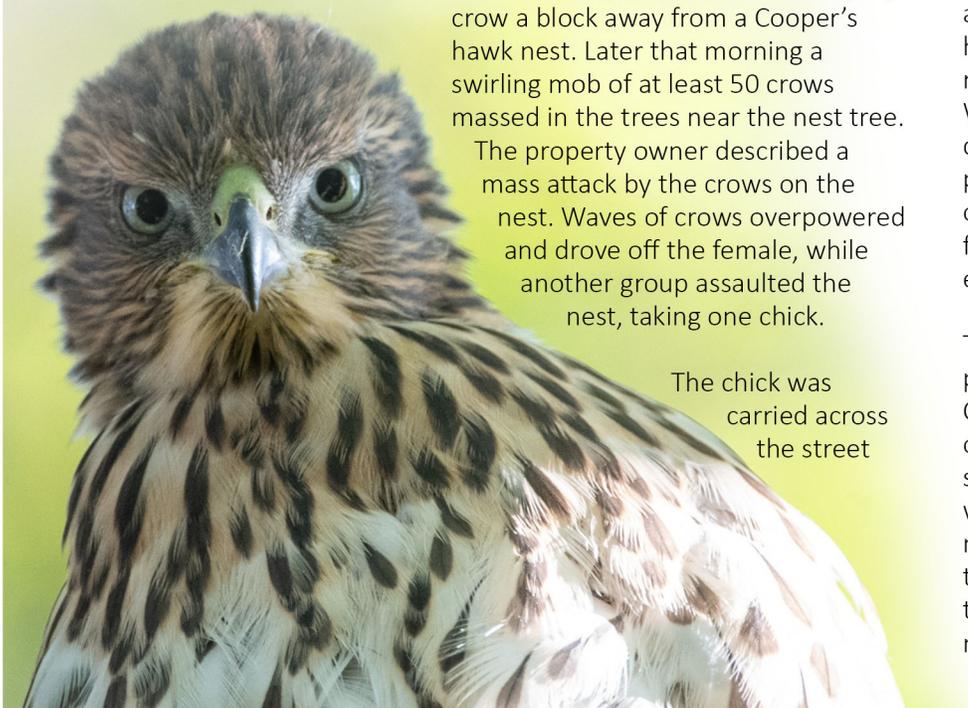
In 2016, a resident in the Victory Heights neighborhood of Seattle witnessed a Cooper's hawk kill a fledgling crow a block away from a Cooper's hawk nest. Later that morning a swirling mob of at least 50 crows massed in the trees near the nest tree.

The property owner described a mass attack by the crows on the nest. Waves of crows overpowered and drove off the female, while another group assaulted the nest, taking one chick.

The chick was carried across the street

and dropped from a considerable height. It was dead when the witness retrieved it from a neighbor's driveway. We estimated the chick's age at 12 days. After the attack the mob dispersed. We checked the nest frequently over the next few days and surprisingly found surviving chicks, and the pair eventually fledged three.

This June, a different Coop nest property owner sent a photo of a dead Coop chick, describing a "commotion" of agitated calling Coops and crows at sunset the night before. The next day we searched the grounds under the nest tree. As in 2016, the nest contained three surviving chicks that lived to fledge. In both cases the chick was not eaten, just killed.





Pair of adults.
L: male, R: female
(Trileigh Tucker)

A Year in the Life of a Fledgling Cooper's hawk

As of October 2025, about 200 fledglings were “out there” in the Seattle area. They are busy honing their hunting skills and wandering in search of a good territory to spend their first winter. Most urban Coops disperse short distances, settling down a few miles from their natal nest. In a telemetry study in Tucson, Arizona, males dispersed on average 2.4 miles and females 4.2 miles. This is consistent with our own findings from banded Seattle Cooper's hawks.

For all raptors, the first year of life is the most difficult. About 50-60% will die before their first birthday. Common causes are window and car collisions, poisoning, predation, and starvation. The relatively few that make it to adulthood and successful nesting are akin to Olympic-level athletes.



(John Gossman)

Poor Man's Telemetry

Occasionally we receive a cluster of band sightings that neatly outlines a bird's movements and nesting territory, even without using telemetry. Between September 2023 and June 2025, a two-year-old male, banded purple left B-4, was spotted in the Maple Leaf neighborhood a total of 11 times at four different locations within a 1.1-km-diameter circle. Eight of the reports included a photo of the ID band. This past summer a local informant tipped us off regarding a new nest with fledglings in nearby Sacajawea Park. The nest is inside the circle of sightings, and purple B-4 is likely the provisioning male for that nest. We hope to confirm that suspicion in March 2026.



Banded Coop purple B-4 stalking bird feeder
(Dennis Paulson)

Homage to Purple Left 3-7

A recent fledgling at Volunteer Park was banded in July 2013 as purple left 3-7. Five years later, in March 2018, he was in a courting, nest-building pair at Laurelhurst Playfield 2.5 miles away. An informant said that Coops had nested there the previous two years, 2016 and 2017. Given the bird's age, we probably also missed his first nesting season in 2015. Not counting the missing three years, he is known to have fledged 28 young.

One of his sons, purple left 2-4, nested for three years (2019-2021) at the Union Bay Natural Area (UBNA). Purple left 2-4 disappeared over the winter of 2021-2022. In 2022, his mate (orange right D-2) moved from UBNA to Laurelhurst Playfield — where she nested for three years with, in human terms, her father-in-law.

Purple 3-7 did not return to nest in 2025 and was replaced by an unbanded adult male. At 11 years old, purple 3-7 was the oldest known Coop in our study, surpassed only by Jack Bettsworth's "Old Blue", who disappeared last year at 14 years old.

Molt

Molting starts in breeding females shortly after they lay eggs and start incubating. By late summer you might see a bird halfway through its molt [1] or bedraggled from molt and the labors of the nesting season [2, 3].



[1] Bird molting from juvenile to adult (Chris Wise)



[2]



[3]

[2] Bedraggled female P4 near end of raising young (John Gossman)

[3] Molting male purple B-D (Stephanie Colony)



Top: Coop chasing a red-tailed hawk (John Gossman)
Bottom: Three recently fledged siblings (John Gossman)

Since 2011, I have been fortunate to witness the amazing population growth of urban Cooper's hawks. The Seattle population has tripled over the 15 years since we took over the study from founder Jack Bettsworth. Cooper's hawks are now the most common urban raptor across North America. If I had said a few decades ago that there were 76 nest-building pairs of Coops in Seattle, I would have been thought daft.

Of our many accomplishments together, I am most proud that URC has fostered the development of a cadre of skilled field observers and a community of shared interests. Watching Cooper's hawks is not a secret enterprise; anyone with patience and a few observational tools can learn much about the most common raptor in Seattle – one that most people never see.



WITH THANKS:

Thanks to all the volunteers who contributed uncounted hours to track the population, and to the photographers who permitted the use of their excellent images.

Ed Deal & Patti Loesche
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