

Buteo nitidus (Grey or Grey-lined Hawk)

Family: Accipitridae (Hawks, Kites and Eagles)

Order: Falconiformes (Diurnal Birds of Prey)

Class: Aves (Birds)



Fig. 1. Grey hawk, *Asturina nitida*.

[http://www.buildidaho.com/idaho_subdivisions/ada_county/kuna_new_subdivisions/greyhawk_subdivision/, downloaded 11 April 2017]

TRAITS. *Buteo nitidus*, formerly known as *Asturina nitida*, is a medium sized hawk with short wings and long tail (Fig. 1). Adults are 46-61cm long and weigh approximately 476g (Wikipedia, 2017), with wingspan of 82-98 cm. The underparts of adults are white with narrow grey bars. The back is grey, and the tail is black with two or three white bands and rump. Females are larger than males. Juveniles tend to have dark brown underparts and backs, with brown tails with 5-9 black bands (Kropp, 2002). The beak is black or dark grey in both adults and juveniles, and their irises are brown. They also have orange legs and black talons.

DISTRIBUTION. They are found throughout the Americas (Fig. 2), from the Amazon Basin (South America) through Central America in countries such as Costa Rica to the south-western United States (Kropp, 2002). In the breeding season they can be found in south Texas, New

Mexico and Arizona (Glinski, 1998). They commonly migrate during spring in order to breed, to the southwestern USA, and journey back during the middle of October to Central and South America for the winter months.

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. Grey hawks live in woodlands, agricultural land, deciduous forests, savannas, open country, river edges, clear cuts and forest edges. They are diurnal, and so active during the day (Glinski, 1998; Stiles and Skutch, 1989). In the afternoon, they soar with their wings levelled and their tail fanned low to the ground (Fig. 3). They glide and flap intermittently during flight and when prey is detected, they drop rapidly in order to grasp it using their talons, plucking food from tree trunks or the ground as they fly by. They can be found in dry second growth forest, which is a regrown woodland after a timber area was harvested, in tropical ranges of the Amazon.

FOOD AND FEEDING. Grey hawks consume amphibians, small birds, insects and reptiles such as lizards. Lizards and other reptiles primarily make up the diet. It hunts within their home range with consists of tall trees, observing its prey with ease from the high height. This allows them to capture their prey easily (Gurrola-Hidalgo and Chavez, 1996). Once the prey is selected it manoeuvres and flies through trees and capture the prey using the talons (Fig. 4). They also eat birds and small mammals.

POPULATION ECOLOGY. A three year research done in the San Pedro River located in Arizona observed twenty seven nesting areas of *B. nitidus*. The productivity measured was 1.32 young per nest occupied. The mean size of home range for 10 breeding males were 59.2 ha and nests were commonly found in cottonwood trees, due to them being the only tall trees available (Glinski 1998). Other than cottonwood trees, two nests were found in willow trees.

REPRODUCTION. Grey hawks are monogamous creatures whereby males use calls, coordinated aerial flights and help to build nests in order to court females. Males make the base of the nest while the females shapes the rest of the nest using twigs and leaves. The nest is about 20cm deep and approximately 50cm wide. Nest can be found within the outer top branch of trees and sometimes close to the trunk. They breed during mid-March. The female lays 2-8 white or a pale blue eggs in a clutch. They incubate by sitting on the eggs for approximately 33 days and the male catches food for the female at this time. When the eggs are hatched, the young stay in the nest for nearly 6 weeks (Bibles, 1999).

APPLIED ECOLOGY. It is listed as Least Concern as reproduction helps to balance out the rate of mortality. Also, their wide range of prey to feed on helps to sustain a reliable food cycle. The only threat to their existence is recreational disturbance as nestlings tend to be sensitive when it comes to human activity and may be preyed on by monkeys, coatis and snakes. There is no information that promotes the idea that the species is currently threatened (IUCN, 2016).

REFERENCES

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Fig. 2. Map of distribution of grey hawk or grey-lined hawk, *Buteo nitidus*

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Gray_Hawk/id, downloaded 28 January 2017]



Fig. 3. Grey hawk active in flight

[<http://earbirding.com/blog/archives/539>, downloaded 28 January 2017]



Fig. 4. Grey hawk with a ground cuckoo for food.

[<http://www.jimzippphotography.com/cpg/displayimage.php?album=65&pos=9>, downloaded 5 February 2017]

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