

They feed in coastal marshes, tidal mudflats, stagnant backwaters, bayous, swamps, and mangroves. They are more diurnal in their feeding than Black-crowned Night-Herons, but their large eyes are probably adaptations for crepuscular and nocturnal foraging. The tide cycle may affect their feeding schedule. Their prey are mostly crustaceans, with crabs and crayfish preferred items. They also eat mollusks, snails, frogs, snakes, and young birds. They will feed opportunistically on an abundant resource (e.g., grasshoppers). They rarely eat fish. They usually forage by standing or walking slowly, and are often seen head swaying and neck swaying as they stalk their prey. Their status has remained largely unchanged in Massachusetts during the past half-century. During the nineteenth century in North America their range was reduced to largely coastal areas, but they have expanded their range in the twentieth century up to and beyond their former range. They were not hunted for plumes, but are reported to be, or have been, a favored food item in parts of the south. They have adapted well to human habitation, and are often seen in campgrounds or parklands in much of their range.

W.E. Davis, Jr.

#### ABOUT OUR COVER ARTIST

Paul Donahue's artwork last appeared on *Bird Observer's* cover in June 1993. Paul can be reached at P.O. Box 554, Machias, Maine 04654.

The Yellow-crowned Night-Heron drawing first appeared in a catalog of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT). Victor Emanuel has kindly given *Bird Observer* permission to use this drawing. VENT conducts birding tours around the world. Their address is P.O. Box 33008, Austin, Texas 78764.

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## AT A GLANCE *June 1994* \_\_\_\_\_ *Wayne R. Petersen*

Perched hawks! What a tough and often humiliating experience they can create for even the most avid and experienced hawk watchers. Unlike the dot in the sky that is usually going away and mercifully seldom allows a second look, a perched hawk leaves little room for retreat when a controversial identification is involved.

June's mystery hawk is entirely typical of the problem—a lone individual with only tree branches for comparison; an immature, as suggested by the streaked underparts (a condition found in only a few adult North American hawks); and no obvious flight behavioral characteristics to lend a clue. Given these realities, it is necessary to carefully analyze the bird—its shape, structure,

and pattern—in order to determine its correct identity.

Structurally, the bird is very heavy across the chest, and it appears to have a fairly long tail. On the basis of the bird's heftiness, one might be tempted to think *Buteo*; however, the tail length is much longer than is typical of these otherwise chunky birds. Furthermore, the largest and heaviest of the Massachusetts *Buteos*, the Red-tailed and the Rough-legged hawks, both have distinctive underpart patterns. Redtails normally display a white, unpatterned chest, no matter how much belly streaking they possess. Roughlegs, on the other hand, usually show a variably dark belly band and a pale head with a necklace of dark streaks when in their light morph. Furthermore, Roughlegs often perch on the tops of trees or bushes and not as often on a branch in the center of a tree the way the pictured bird is doing.

Returning to the bulkiness of the bird and its long tail, we are ultimately left with the possibility of the bird being either a large *Accipiter* or a large falcon. Gyrfalcons and Peregrine Falcons are somewhat disinclined to perch in trees, especially the Gyrfalcon, which normally breeds in treeless environments and prefers to perch on or close to the ground or on high, cliff-like perches. Accipiters, however, typically perch in the middle of a tree much like the bird in the photo.

Important features of the mystery bird are a prominent eyebrow stripe, fine ventral streaks that seem to include the flanks and the midbelly, wavy (rather than straight) tail bands, and noticeably pointed tips to the central tail feathers. The combination of these features, along with the absence of a whitish, unstreaked belly and clearly rounded tail feathers lacking white terminal tips, suggest that the bird is not an overly robust female Cooper's Hawk. In addition,



the rather flat-headed, and not round-headed, appearance and the lack of any obvious facial stripes or fine banding on the tail indicates that the bird is unlikely to be a Gyrfalcon or a Peregrine Falcon.

The inevitable conclusion is that the bird is an immature Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*). The goshawk in the picture was photographed during the winter in Tiverton, Rhode Island by Linda M. Gray.

## AT A GLANCE

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Photo by Alfred M. Bailey  
Courtesy of MAS



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

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