

**ARIZONA GAME AND FISH DEPARTMENT  
HERITAGE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**

**Animal Abstract**

**Element Code:** ABNKC19011

**Data Sensitivity:** YES

**CLASSIFICATION, NOMENCLATURE, DESCRIPTION, RANGE**

**NAME:** *Buteo plagiatus* (Schlegel 1862)

**COMMON NAME:** Gray Hawk

**SYNONYMS:** *Asturina plagiata* Schlegel 1862, *Buteo nitidus maximus* van Rossem

**FAMILY:** Accipitridae

**AUTHOR, PLACE OF PUBLICATION:** Schlegel, 1862, Mus. Hist. Nat. Pays-Bas, Rev. Method. Crit. Coll., livr. 1, Asturinae, p.1, note.

**TYPE LOCALITY:** Veracruz, Mexico

**TYPE SPECIMEN:**

**TAXONOMIC UNIQUENESS:** Monotypic genus.

**DESCRIPTION:** "Slate gray dorsum, white-fringed upper-tail coverts, and a black tail with two or (rarely) three perpendicular white bands and a pale gray terminal band. On the venter, adults show a white throat patch; gray and white barred breast, abdomen, and thighs; white crissum; and dark tail with three to (rarely) four light proximal bands and a terminal light band." Juvenile plumage noticeably different from adult. Juveniles have dark brown dorsum (including crown) with light mottling on nape, light upper tail coverts with some brown spots and brownish-gray tail with from five to nine dark bands. Venter is light creamy brown with numerous dark brown streaks and spots. Thigh light with dark brown perpendicular bars. Crissum light and undersurface of tail is light-grayish-brown with from five to ten dark bands. Sides of face lighter in color than crown and neck, and usually distinctive dark stripe from base of bill along sides of throat.

**AIDS TO IDENTIFICATION:** Young plumed in manner distinctive from adults. In field appear brown on back and cream, buff and brown streaked on breast and head; tail finely barred with shades of brown. Retain this plumage for slightly over one year after which they begin to take on adult appearance.

Adults have blue-gray to slate-gray back and head, very finely barred gray and white breast and black tail with two to three bold, white bands.

On both young and adults, eye color is dark brownish to black, and feet and cere are deep yellow in healthy birds.

Color pattern distinctive, seldom confused with another species. Young frequently confused with young *Accipiter cooperi* or *Buteo platypterus*. Voice, perching and flight mannerisms assist in identification. Young usually acquire full vocal repertoire of adults when one year old.

**ILLUSTRATIONS:**

Brown and Amadon, 1968, Plate 94.  
Glinski, 1998, color plate 14.

**TOTAL RANGE:** “Resident from southern Arizona, southern New Mexico (rarely), western (rarely) and southern Texas south through Middle America (including the Bay Islands, off Honduras) to northwestern Costa Rica (Gulf of Nicoya region). Northernmost breeding populations in Arizona, New Mexico, and western Texas are largely migratory southward in nonbreeding season.” (AOU 2012).

**RANGE WITHIN ARIZONA:** Southeast part of state in watersheds of the San Pedro River and Santa Cruz River in Pima, Santa Cruz, and Pinal Counties; individuals also seen along Verde River, Yavapai County; Seven Springs Wash, Maricopa County; the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge, Cochise County.

**SPECIES BIOLOGY AND POPULATION TRENDS**

**BIOLOGY:** Gray hawks are migratory and usually arrive in Arizona in mid-March and go south for the winter. They have four basic calls:

- 1) Peacock or three-note call - often given in slurred and exaggerated manner, especially by female. Function is territory delineation.
- 2) One-or two note whine usually precedes three note call, usually intermixed with squeals. usually given in **A** excited states; **T** times, given alone and in low tone especially by female. Usually denotes irritation such as that caused by intruding raptor.
- 3) One-note alarm or irritation call is one most frequently heard by intruders of nest. Has no variation and is generally given when birds are moderately alarmed and threatened.
- 4) Squeals given by both members of pair and by nestlings. Indicates extremely high state of excitement such as prey exchanges or territorial encounters with other *A. nitida*. Series of quick three-note calls rolled quickly and given in high pitch at rate of 1 to 3 per second. (Glinski 1987).

**REPRODUCTION:** Clutch size 1-3 (usually 2); egg laying usually occurs early May and incubation is by the female only. They usually nest in upper third of the canopy; the nest is made up of leafy green twigs from the nest tree or nearby trees.

**FOOD HABITS:** They generally feed on lizards, especially of the *Sceloporus* genus; some small mammals.

**HABITAT:** Riparian woodlands with large trees (cottonwoods), usually near mesquite forests.

**ELEVATION:**

**PLANT COMMUNITY:** In Arizona, mostly in strands of Sonoran Riparian Deciduous Forest and Woodlands and to a lesser extent in Madrean Evergreen Woodland along the Arizona-Sonora border (vegetation classification after D. E. Brown 1982), Glinski 1998.

**POPULATION TRENDS:** Apparently stable.

### **SPECIES PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION**

**ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT STATUS:**  
**STATE STATUS:**

SC (USDI, FWS 1996)  
None (AGFD SWAP 2012)  
[None. AGFD, WSCA 1996 in prep]  
[State Threatened AGFD, TNW 1988]  
None, USDA FS Region 3, 2013  
[Forest Service Sensitive USDA Region 3  
1999, 2007 (under genus *Asturina*)]  
Not BLM Sensitive (USDI, BLM AZ 2010)  
[Bureau of Land Management Sensitive  
(USDI, BLM AZ 2000, 2008)]  
[None (USDI, BLM AZ 2005)]

**OTHER STATUS:**

**MANAGEMENT FACTORS:** Preserve mesquite bosques to prevent extirpation.

**PROTECTIVE MEASURES TAKEN:** Several areas in public or private preserves including The Arizona Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stewardship (protecting a total of 42 nesting sites).

**SUGGESTED PROJECTS:**

**LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP:** The Arizona Nature Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, State Parks, Coronado National Forest, and private ownership.

## **SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION**

### **REFERENCES:**

- Arizona Game and Fish Department. 1988. Threatened Native Wildlife in Arizona. p. 16.
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- Bureau of Land Management Sensitive (USDI, BLM AZ 2000, 2008)
- Bureau of Land Management Sensitive (USDI, BLM AZ 2000, 2008)

### **MAJOR KNOWLEDGEABLE INDIVIDUALS:**

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### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

See Glinski's (1998) *Raptors of Arizona* for more detailed information on this species.

**Revised:** 2000-04-04 (SSS)  
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