



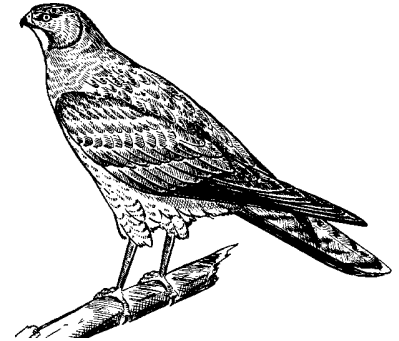
Rare Wildlife of New Hampshire

Northern Harrier

Circus cyaneus

NEW HAMPSHIRE: THREATENED

UNITED STATES: NOT LISTED



How does it look and behave?

The Northern harrier is 18-22 inches long with a 40-45 inch wing spread. It is a slender, long-legged raptor with a long, slim, barred tail and narrow wings.

Appearance: The male is silver-gray with black wingtips. The female is larger and is light brown. A prominent white rump patch on both sexes is visible in flight.

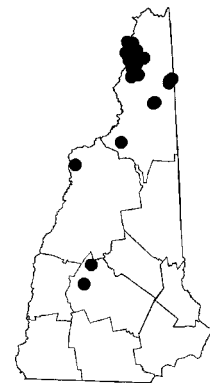
Behavior: The harrier tilts from side to side as it glides just a few feet off the ground. Its wings are held in a V-shape during flight. Harriers perch close to the ground on tree stumps, fence posts, and grass hummocks. They hunt on the wing, hovering, diving, and gliding close to the ground before pouncing on their prey of small mammals, birds, and insects.

Breeding: The male “sky dances” during courtship with nose dives, loops, and somersaults, often accompanied by shrill screams. Sometimes the pair swoops side by side through the air. Crows, hawks, eagles and humans have been chased away from a harrier’s nesting territory.

Where is it found?

Habitat: The Northern harrier, formerly called the marsh hawk, inhabits open land including old fields and pastures, wet meadows, bogs, shrub swamps, and marshes. A variety of edge types offer good hunting grounds.

Nest: The nest is built on the ground near shrubs, in tall weeds or reeds, on a tussock of grass, or on elevated dry ground near a swamp.



Northern harrier

● nest sites



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Range: Northern harriers are found throughout the United States, Canada and north to Alaska. They winter from southern New England, west across the continent and south through Mexico and Central America to northwestern South America and the West Indies. Harriers return to New Hampshire in March or April and migrate south beginning in August and continuing into late fall. Breeding activity has been recorded primarily in Coos County. A few harriers winter in New Hampshire’s seacoast.

What are the management opportunities?

To prevent further declines in New Hampshire’s harrier population, it’s essential to protect and maintain suitable habitats. Foresters, landowners, and other land managers can follow the following management recommendations:

- Retain remaining agricultural lands and other open habitats including hayfields, shrub lands, marshes, and other wetlands. Protect these areas from development and other disturbance.
- Delay mowing of fields and overgrown fields until after mid-August to avoid interfering with the nesting season (May - July).
- Limit mowing to once every 1-3 years in fields not harvested for high quality hay.
- Avoid human disturbance and keep pets (dogs and cats) and domestic livestock clear of known nesting areas during the breeding season.

What should you do if you see a harrier?

It’s most important to report sightings of Northern harrier breeding activity or potential nesting. If you observe or suspect nesting contact New Hampshire Fish & Game Department, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, 2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301, (603) 271-2462 or Audubon Society of NH, 3 Silk Farm Road, Concord, NH 03301, (603) 224-9909. Artwork by Victor Young ©.



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