

[From Winter 1999]

Goshawks at ESVNWR

The person on the phone was excited. The only words heard were Reese and goshawk. We knew immediately that Reese Lukei had caught a Northern Goshawk. Reese, our refuge volunteer hawk bander and Center for Conservation Biology, College of William and Mary, research associate held the bird for us as we made our way to the banding station at Wise Point. The largest accipiter is very often observed during hawk counts in Virginia, but very few are caught and banded. This juvenile male was fitted with its personal ID band and was sent on its way south with help from refuge intern Fran Saenz. This bird was the beginning of a trend as Reese caught three more the following two days.

Reese bands migratory raptors in one of the three spots on the lower Delmarva Peninsula. The other two spots are operated by Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (formerly known as KESTREL) at Kiptopeke State Park and Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge. Every fall, from early September to mid December, Reese can be found at his home away from home -- the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. This banding project was started in 1982 by Dr. Mitchell Byrd, Director Emeritus of the Center for Conservation Biology.

The most common raptors trapped are kestrels, merlins, peregrine falcons, sharp-shinned hawks, Cooper's hawks, northern harriers, and red-tailed hawks. Occasionally, others such as our friend the goshawk are trapped and banded. On average, Reese traps 800 birds each year. Some of these have been banded at other locations and are considered retraps, but the majority are newly caught birds. The majority of birds trapped are sharp-shinned hawks, and many of those he has banded have been recovered at locations as close as Fisherman Island and as far away as Brazil to the south and Newfoundland to the north.

As for goshawks, Reese has banded only a handful of them since 1989 (3 in 1991, 1 in 1995, and 4 in 1997). Therefore, it is easy to see why he was so excited on that quiet Sunday morning in November of 1999.

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