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## Goshawk encounter

Posted by HooT - 12/03/2007 09:05am

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Greetings fellow arbornauts!

Just wanted to share a profound encounter I had last week, with a question at the end. I had the chance to climb a gorgeous Tulip(Yellow) Poplar in Philadelphia last week while visiting family for Thanksgiving (there are some AMAZING large trees in Fairmount Park, apparently the largest wooded inner city park in the country). Was about 70 some feet up and sitting still drinking it all in for a couple of moments with my back to the trunk when at arms reach a mature goshawk flew by so close that I could feel it's wind on my face. (I named this wild tree "Hawkwind"). It was heading in the direction I was facing, and it's back was maybe 18" below my eyes, so I was actually looking down on it for that split second. It was incredible to then follow it's flight from the bird's own "flight level" through the bare canopies until it was out of sight.

This encounter was most memorable to me for a couple of reasons. One, how many bird books have you ever seen that show a birds identification markings FROM ABOVE? I still can't help but grin when I think of that. Two, I am a huge admirer of birds and everything about them, and feel pretty confident in saying that I don't think the bird knew I was there. His flight pattern didn't flinch or alter in any way when passing me, and the trunk's diameter was still large enough at that height (it was a 120' tree) to essentially hide me from the angle the bird was flying from. That and the bird seemed pretty intent on his course which continued on steadily. Three, he didn't harass me! Which brings me to my question:

Has anyone had issues with goshawks? Approaching a tree, getting ready to climb, or once in a tree? If you have please post about it. Goshawks are notoriously protective and territorial birds, and are well known to harass and get physical with people who intrude into their territory, especially when nesting. I've known people walking down trails in the woods get buzzed by them, and one actually attacked, and it's not really unusual. So this whole encounter has made me wonder if being up in a tree changes this dynamic as it seems to do with other birds.

When all was said and done, I felt incredibly blessed to have experienced such a close and safe encounter with this hawk!

Hope everyone is having a great day.  
Eric

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## Re:Goshawk encounter

Posted by moss - 12/04/2007 08:18am

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Great report Eric. There's nothing like having birds fly below you in the tree. There's a book called 'Hawks in Flight' by Pete Dunne, David Sibley and Clay Sutton. The drawings are excellent and show views from above. Goshawks near their nest will be very aggressive (attack!) towards humans on the ground or in a tree if it's close to the nest. Outside of the breeding season in spring/early summer they'll leave you alone.

In general I've found that wildlife is much less concerned about humans in trees. They key onto the vertical two-legged stance profile on the ground and the peculiar walking cadence of humans, in the tree you're just another branch if you're not moving.

The best way to get birds and other wildlife to flee is raise your arm and point your finger at them, they probably think it's a gun. When I find a bird or other animal in close proximity I try to watch them out of the corner of my eye or not look at them at all, when you look at them directly they regard it as a predator's stare. I've heard of researchers painting a pair of eyes on the back of their helmets to prevent nesting Goshawks from striking them on the back of their head or neck.

Doubtful that Northern Goshawk is nesting in the wooded park in Philly, could be a northern migrant looking for food.  
-moss

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## Re:Goshawk encounter

Posted by HooT - 12/07/2007 11:58pm

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Thanks for the insights moss. I will definitely find the 'Hawks in Flight' book you mentioned. I wonder if my falconer friend has seen it.. if not it sounds like it'd be a great holiday gift for both of us. I am especially fascinated by the different attitudes of wildlife towards us humans between when we're aloft and the "usual" when we're grounded. The more I

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experience that dynamic in various encounters the more intriguing it is. Makes me think of the scene in Jurassic Park when the people first encounter the little compys (Procompsognathus) and they are simply curious until their behavior is provoked into being aggressive through a careless / thoughtless action on the humans part. I like the idea of being "just another branch"...

~ Eric

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## Re:Goshawk encounter

Posted by michaeljspraggon - 12/08/2007 07:53am

Hi Moss & Eric,

I've had similar experiences in England. The first time I climbed a giant Redwood in England, I was sitting right at the summit when a Lesser-Spotted Woodpecker landed on the top about 2ft from my head. Even when I was moving around it didn't fly off.

I was lucky enough to meet Steve Sillett when he and Robert Van Pelt came to Britain on a lecture tour and I mentioned this to him. He too thinks that animals don't expect to see a 180 lb Hominid in the treetops so they're not worried. He told me that he's even had small animals walk over him while sitting in a tree!!!

However, once I was crossing from the top of a Beech into the canopy of a taller Scots Pine when a squirrel came out of a hidden drey and sat inches away from my face chattering angrily. I had no choice but to slowly retreat...

Michael

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## Re:Goshawk encounter

Posted by HooT - 12/09/2007 11:03am

Awesome Michael! Thanks for sharing that with us. The goshawk was the most intense encounter along these lines, but I've also had some great ones that further illustrate this principle. The first time I was treetop camping a crew (not sure what to call them... a gaggle of geese, a murder of crows, a \_\_\_\_\_ of chickadees???) of chickadees landed in the top of the Eastern White Pine I was in and surrounded me in my hammock for about five minutes. They were very clearly intrigued by my presence and were chattering away quite animatedly about it, flying right up next to me and inspecting and reporting to their mates. I was afraid to move not wanting to disrupt the conference because it was so fascinating from my point of view. I really felt like a lab specimen being examined by a host of scientists. It was awesome.

This phenomenon of wildlife interacting with us humans out of our "usual" context is truly remarkable. Any other stories to share anyone???

Eric

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## Re:Goshawk encounter

Posted by Baker - 02/20/2008 07:55am

Because I work at a raptor rehab. center, I feel my stories shouldn't be allowed - too many of them!

The big birds are not the problem, in my opinion. At least you can see them coming!!!! It's the little ones that'll git 'ya. Chickadees are relentless! Blue Jays Bite! Mocking Birds will dive on you until you either leave or fall!!!!

May I remind you though, that, as of January, breeding season has already begun for many birds such as Bald Eagles and Great Horned Owls. The rest will follow suit very shortly. Please be mindful of nests and cavities while climbing.