

## Stillman Nature Center

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### 2007: Year of the Cooper's Stillman Newsletter, Autumn 2007

This summer, Cooper's Hawks (*Accipiter cooperii*) were being seen and heard in the vicinity of the nature center's main dock. Accipiters, such as the Cooper's, can be told by their short rounded wings and long, rudder-like tail.

Why the distinctive body design for the accipiter? Cooper's hawks live in woodlands and roughly 70% of their diet are other birds. Short wings and a long tail facilitate adept aerial maneuvers required by their preferred prey and habitat.

Because we had our binoculars trained on a nearby red-tailed hawk nest (which failed) and we assumed the construction of our new building for permanently-injured raptors would scare off any nesting activity in the immediate area, the Cooper's nest was not discovered until the three nestlings were just about ready to leave (see pictures).



*Cooper's hawk nestlings.*

That's right, the Cooper's nest placed high in a mulberry tree was located a scant 75 feet from the raptor enclosure. To me, it seemed as if these wild birds of prey had given our new building the "good nest keeping" seal of approval.



*A week later, one of the youngsters keeps his eyes on us poor ground creatures.*

### Cooper's Crooners

Since I live about three trees down from the raptor mulberry, I've enjoyed listening to the variety of calls made by these birds.

I've heard the female's *whaaa* given when plucking dinner delivered by the male or while flying to the nestlings with food. Then, there is the ever popular and best known *cak-cak-cak* or alarm call given when the parents feel the nest is threatened.

As I type this, I'm hearing the *eeeeeee-oo* or *speeeeeeeoo* given when the young have fledged and are apparently food-begging. Typically, raptors learn to fly weeks before they learn to hunt so food begging continues outside of the nest.

Visitors on an August Sunday afternoon got to watch as the young Cooper's hawks practiced their hunting skills on juvenile green herons. The herons were more annoyed than harmed. Typically, Cooper's hunt smaller prey such as robins, jays, starlings and chipmunks.

### **A Bird in the Talons is Worth Two...**

Watching the young hawks practice their hunting maneuvers reminds me of a fable told by Hesiod, an ancient Greek poet.

A hawk catches a nightingale and prepares to eat her. The nightingale argues that she is too small to satisfy the mighty hawk and she begs him to let her go. The hawk responds that a small bird who calms a little hunger is better than a big bird not yet caught.

Young Cooper's take note.

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