

The Sparrowhawk

Scientific Name: *Accipiter nisus*

Irish Name: Spoiróg

The Sparrowhawk is a small bird of prey. There are other birds of prey in Ireland, such as kestrels and goshawks, but sparrowhawks are probably the most common. It is estimated that there are about 11,000 pairs of sparrowhawks in Ireland and they can be seen in every county. They breed in suitable woodland areas, building their nest in trees, but they are scarce in the west where the tree cover is lower than elsewhere. Those that are resident in winter are joined by birds from Britain and Europe during these months.

The sparrowhawk has blunt tipped wings and a long tail. Its bill is small and hooked and is suitable for eating meat. It has long yellow legs and long talons. The female bird is larger than the male. Both have banded plumage on their tails and underparts. The adult male has bluish-grey back and wing and orange-brown bands on its chest. The female and young birds have brown backs and wings and brown banding underneath.

The Young

The sparrowhawk builds its nest, usually from twigs, in the fork of trees. It will lay 4 to 5 eggs in May, pale blue and spotted brown in colour. When small, the chicks are covered in soft white feathers and will stay in the nest for about 26-30 days.



A Bird of Prey

The Sparrowhawk has adapted to hunting in confined spaces and can fly through branches and small gaps to catch its prey. It can be seen in large parks and gardens and will sometimes prey on the birds that visit birdfeeders. It mainly eats small birds, such as thrushes, tits, woodpigeons and sparrows.



A Sparrowhawk.

FACT FILE

Colour: Adult male is blue-grey back and wings. orange-brown banding on chest. Female is brown back and wings and brown banding underneath.

Length: Wingspan 60-75cm.

Diet: Mainly small birds.

Call: A shrill kew-kew-kew when alarmed.

Egg: Lays 4-5 in May; pale blue and spotted brown.