

Size comparisons between the Sparrowhawks:

	Black Sparrowhawk		Ovambo Sparrowhawk		Little Sparrowhawk	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Length (approx)	40cm	52cm	30cm	37cm	23cm	25cm
Wingspan (approx)	64cm	95cm	60cm	70cm	39cm	50cm
Weight (approx)	540g	900g	140g	260g	80g	106g

Over the next few months we will be printing a series of pamphlets featuring the raptors seen on our CCJ estate.

These include the Black Sparrowhawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Ovambo Sparrowhawk, Gabar Goshawk, Long-crested Eagle, Common Buzzard, African Harrier Hawk, European Honey Buzzard and Spotted Eagle Owl.



Juvenile showing spots on its breast



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THE COUNTRY CLUB
JOHANNESBURG



Little Sparrowhawk

**No.3 in our series:
Raptors of the Woodmead Estate**



As its name implies, this is the smallest of the sparrowhawks (about the size of a Laughing dove). This bird of prey is also distinguished by two white spots on the underside of its central tail feathers and by a narrow white patch on the lower rump. The underparts are white barred with fine rufous bars. The females are overall browner on the upperparts and the underpart bars are also browner and less fine than the male. The bill is black, the long legs and long toes are yellow, the eyes are deep yellow. The length is 23–27cm; the wingspan is 39–50cm, the male weighs 74–85g and the female 78–108g



Distribution and habitat:

The little sparrowhawk occurs in eastern and southern sub-Saharan Africa from Ethiopia, to the southern DRC and northern Angola, south as far as the eastern Western Cape in South Africa.

The Little sparrowhawk is a woodland bird which can be found in patches of woodland and scrub, typically along river valleys. In drier areas it can be found in open areas such as fynbos and grassland; also in suburban gardens.

Breeding:

The Little sparrowhawk is monogamous and a territorial solitary nester. The male's display sees him perch with his body held parallel to the perch as he sways his head from side to side. The female takes most of the responsibility of building the nest, constructing a small stick platform which has a thin lining of green leaves. She typically places the nest in the main fork of a tree, favouring alien species such as Eucalyptus, poplars, jacaranda and weeping willow. She will use the old nest of a Shikra or Gabar goshawk rather than building her own nest.

In southern Africa the one to three eggs are laid from September to December, with a peak in October. The eggs are incubated by both the male and the female for about 31–32 days, although the female will perform at least three quarters of the incubation. The male regularly brings food to the incubating female and he continues to do so as she takes responsibility for the brooding of the chicks. The male also defends the nest from any other birds which approach it and vigorously chases them away, very vigorously if the intruding bird is another bird of prey. The young fledge at about 25–27 days old, remaining on their parents' territory for up to a year.



Food:

The little sparrowhawk, like the Black and Ovambo sparrowhawks, is primarily a bird hunter, waiting in cover, then pursuing prey in a short dash and capturing it in flight. The main prey is small birds up to the size of a thrush or dove. Bats may also be caught and some prey is taken from the ground, including frogs, lizards and rodents. Larger insects and termites are also taken.

Survival:

The Little sparrowhawk is a miracle of nature as these birds were almost considered extinct in the eastern countries, but today they are one of the most widespread birds. Over time, due to advancement in the agriculture sector, the sparrowhawk endured many issues related to it. The primary reason why the population of the little sparrowhawk experienced a negative curve is because of pesticides used in the agriculture sector. It did not only affect their population but also the health of their eggs. Fortunately, advances in pesticides means less collateral damage to the environment and today the survival of the Little sparrowhawk is classified as Least Concern.



How long does a Little sparrowhawk live?

The life span for an average adult of this species can be anywhere around four to ten years. Across the world there are 48 plus species of the sparrowhawk, counting both north and south, thus the lifespan relies very much on the habitat conditions and eating habits.