

Artificial Nest Poles for Ferruginous Hawks



Helping a Hawk at Risk

The ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) has experienced dramatic population declines and range contraction in Alberta. The species is listed as Endangered under the Alberta Wildlife Act and Threatened under Canada's Species at Risk Act.

Nest sites are one factor that limit the number of breeding pairs. Installing artificial nest poles can help to increase the number of nesting hawks.

This brochure contains information for landowners interested in providing artificial nest poles for ferruginous hawks.

Few and Far Between

A 2010 inventory estimated the population at only 643 pairs (plus or minus 169). This is less than half the number of birds found in a 1992 population survey.



Pest Control on a Pole

By inviting ferruginous hawks on to your land, you will enjoy a lower ground squirrel population. One pair of nesting hawks will consume up to 500 ground squirrels in a single nesting season!





Keeping Track

Once a nest pole is in place, it's important to keep an eye on it. Every year you should watch the nest pole from a distance (at least 200 meters or yards) to determine whether it is being used and if so, by which species.

Report your findings to the Provincial Ferruginous Hawk Lead, even if the nest pole is not being used. Data sheets for monitoring nest activity are also available. This information will help determine how effective artificial poles are for ferruginous hawk population recovery and also whether there need to be any changes to the platform and pole design.

Check the integrity of the pole and platform structure every five years and repair any damage once the nesting season is over.

Further Information & Contacts

For further information and for assistance in siting artificial nest poles, contact:

Brandy Downey, Provincial Ferruginous Hawk Lead
brandy.downey@gov.ab.ca or 403-381-5526

You can also contact:

Brad Downey, Alberta Conservation Association Biologist
brad.downey@ab-conservation.com or 403-382-4364

More information on prairie species at risk can be found on the MULTISAR website at www.multisar.ca

The information presented here is based on the following report: Migaj, A., C. M. Kemper, B.L. Downey, 2011. Ferruginous hawk artificial nest poles: inventory and construction protocol. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Fish and Wildlife Division, Alberta Species at Risk Report No. 140, Edmonton, AB. 22 pp.

This report is available online at:
srd.alberta.ca/FishWildlife/SpeciesAtRisk/documents/SAR140-FerruginousHawk-ArtificialNestPoles-Mar2011.pdf

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Sustainable Resource Development



If You Build It . . . they may come

How to Install a Successful Nest Pole

Location, Location, Location

Careful consideration of where to place a nest platform is very important. Poles should only be considered where natural nest substrates (trees or cliffs) have historically occurred, but human activity or environmental factors have destroyed or removed them.

To optimize the chance that ferruginous hawks will move in, look for sites that have the following characteristics:

1. Native Prairie Habitat

Ferruginous hawks prefer areas that are at least 50% native prairie.

2. Prey for Hawks

Nest poles should be installed in areas with healthy populations of Richardson's ground squirrels (gophers).

3. Distant From Other Nest Sites

As ferruginous hawks are territorial, artificial nest poles should be located at least 800 m (half a mile) from other suitable nesting sites such as cliffs, trees and other functional artificial platforms.

4. Peace and Quiet

Ferruginous hawks are very sensitive to human disturbance and they would be unlikely to use a nest platform near paved or gravel roads, power lines, oil and gas developments or farmyards.

5. No Other Species at Risk Nearby

Installing a hawk nest pole near a sage grouse lek or burrowing owl den could be very detrimental to those equally sensitive species.



Timing

Install nest poles after July 31st and before March 15th to avoid the breeding period for ferruginous hawks and other sensitive prairie species. Ideally poles should be installed when the ground is dry or frozen, to avoid damaging native grasslands.

If you are interested in installing an artificial nest pole for ferruginous hawks, contact the Provincial Ferruginous Hawk Lead for help in siting and monitoring your artificial nest pole (see back page for contact information).

Design

There are two designs that are successful in Alberta: The Triangle Pole (adapted from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan) and the design provided by AltaLink.

