Iris Colour Change of the Crested Goshawk with Maturity

Tim Looi & Guan-Chiam Soo

Introduction

Iris colour change with age, from juvenile to adult, is a common characteristic among many *Accipitridae* species and may indicate the bird's age (Newton & Marquiss 1982; Liguori 2015). We describe here the iris colour change in Crested Goshawks in Malaysia.

Observations

We monitored two juvenile Crested Goshawk *Lophospiza trivirgata* iris changes as they matured into adulthood over two months, from August to September 2025 at Taman Zaaba Park, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. In August, we noticed the juvenile Crested Goshawk had a very pale yellow iris. By September we noticed their eye colour had transformed into light yellow-orange, as they matured into adulthood. (Plate 1). Plate 2 compares the iris of a juvenile with an adult. The adults have a deep orange-yellow iris (Wells 1999; Clark & Marks 2024).

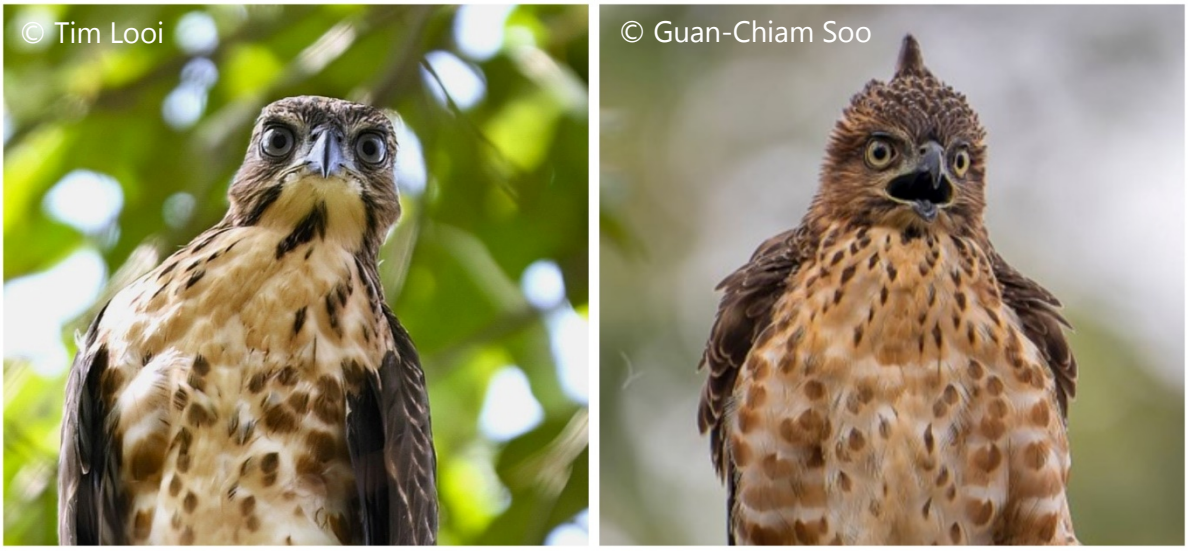

Plate 1: Juvenile Crested Goshawks, Taman Zaaba Park, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Left 12 Aug 2025; Right 16 Sept 2025.

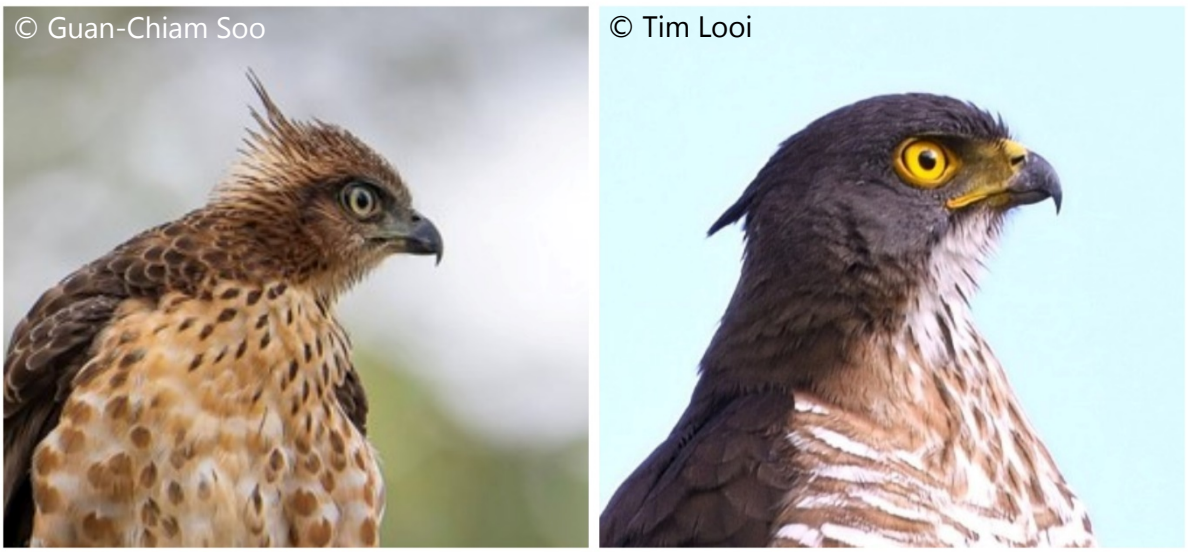

Plate 2: Iris colour of a juvenile (left) vs adult Crested Goshawk.

Discussion

The iris colour in Crested Goshawks, other than plumage, can be helpful in distinguishing juveniles from adults in the field. Note that juveniles are said to have "*eyes brown or more usually paler yellow*" (Clark & Marks 2024). Plate 3 shows a 26 day of life chick with a daker iris (backlit image) and a recently fledged juvenile with a brownish iris. It is uncertain how long it takes for the iris colour in juveniles to change to the adult colour.

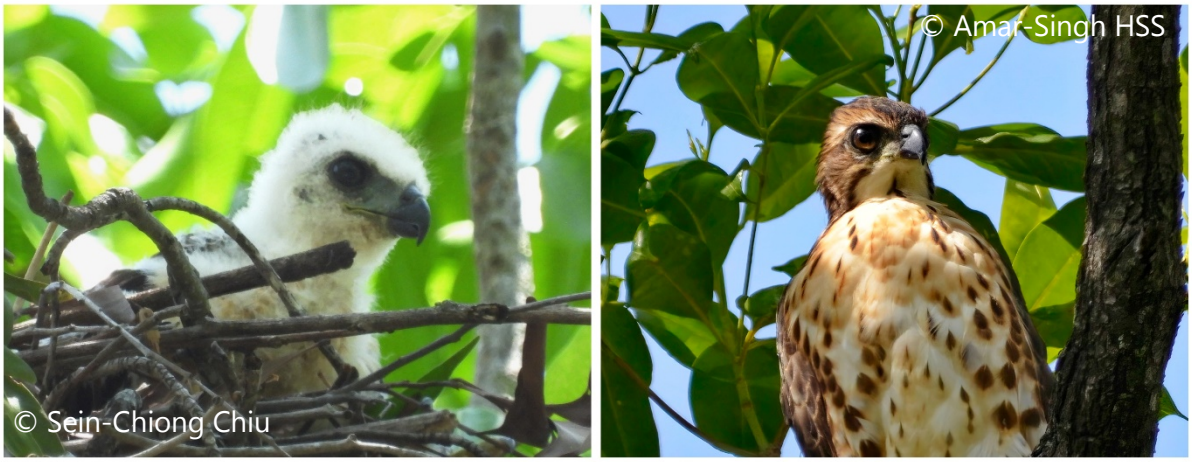

Plate 3: 26 day of life chick (left, 22 March 2021) & a recently fledged juvenile Crested Goshawk (right, 15 Nov 2012), Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia,.

It is possible that iris colour varies among adults. In Birds of the World the iris colour of adults is stated as "*yellow to reddish orange or orange-yellow*" (Clark & Marks 2024). It is uncertain if this variability is a feature of subspecies. It would be good to have local image data of many adults in good light to check for any variability in iris colour. It is uncertain why iris colour changes with age in many *Accipiters*. It may serve as a visual cue to signal an individual's maturity to other raptors, particularly potential mates.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Amar-Singh HSS for support in writing the manuscript and allowing us to use one image. We would like to thank Kim-Chye Lim and Sein-Chiong Chiu for reviewing the manuscript and sharing one image with us.

References

1. Clark, W.S. & Marks J.S. (2024). Crested Goshawk *Lophospiza trivirgata*, version 1.1. In Birds of the World (J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, J. Sargatal, D. A. Christie, and E. de Juana, Editors). *Cornell Lab of Ornithology*, Ithaca, NY, USA.
2. Liguori, J. (2015). Eye Color in Raptors. *HawkWatch International*. [online] https://hawkwatch.org/eye-color-in-raptors/ Accessed on 15 November 2025.
3. Newton, I. & Marquiss, M. (1982). Eye colour, age and breeding performance in Sparrowhawks *Accipiter nisus*. *Bird Study*, 29:3, 195-200. https://doi.org/10.1080/00063658209476757.
4. Wells, D. R. (1999). *The birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula: Vol. 1. Non-passerines*. London: Academic Press.

Citation: Tim Looi & Guan-Chiam Soo (2025). Iris Colour Change of the Crested Goshawk with Maturity. *Malaysian Bird Report*. Volume 4/2025, Dec 2025: pg. 91-92.