

Species Sheets: Ferruginous Hawk



photo by Erwin and Peggy Bauer ©

Common name: Ferruginous Hawk

Latin Name: *Buteo regalis*

Field Marks: Length 23 inches
Wing span 53 inches



The largest soaring buteo hawk. Pale and dark morphs, or color forms. Adults rufous above and pale below. Leg feathers also reddish, forming a V on belly when seen from below. Wings held in a dihedral when soaring and are fairly pointed. Young lighter with whitish leg feathers. Large head and gape, or wide mouth opening. Legs feathered to toes. Drop in population and local disappearances have led to requests that they be listed as threatened species.

Habitat:

Semi-arid open country, prairie, desert and grassland. Also agricultural land, especially in winter. Species of the Western continental U.S. only.

Behavior:

Feeds on most readily available mammals such as rabbits, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, and prairie dogs. Searches for prey in high soaring flight, or from a vantage point often on an outcrop on ground. Also quarters back and forth in flight over hunting grounds, and hovers. May eat large birds like grouse, particularly in winter when many rodents hibernate.

Nest and eggs:

Huge nests built on tops of trees, cliffs, power poles and even on ground and haystacks. Typically in lone tree or on hilltop with view in all directions. Use large sticks and branches. Usually 3-4 eggs. Smaller males fledge earlier than females. Leave nest at 38 to 50 days after hatching. Very sensitive to disturbance, and may abandon nest. Will use and benefit from artificial nest platforms.

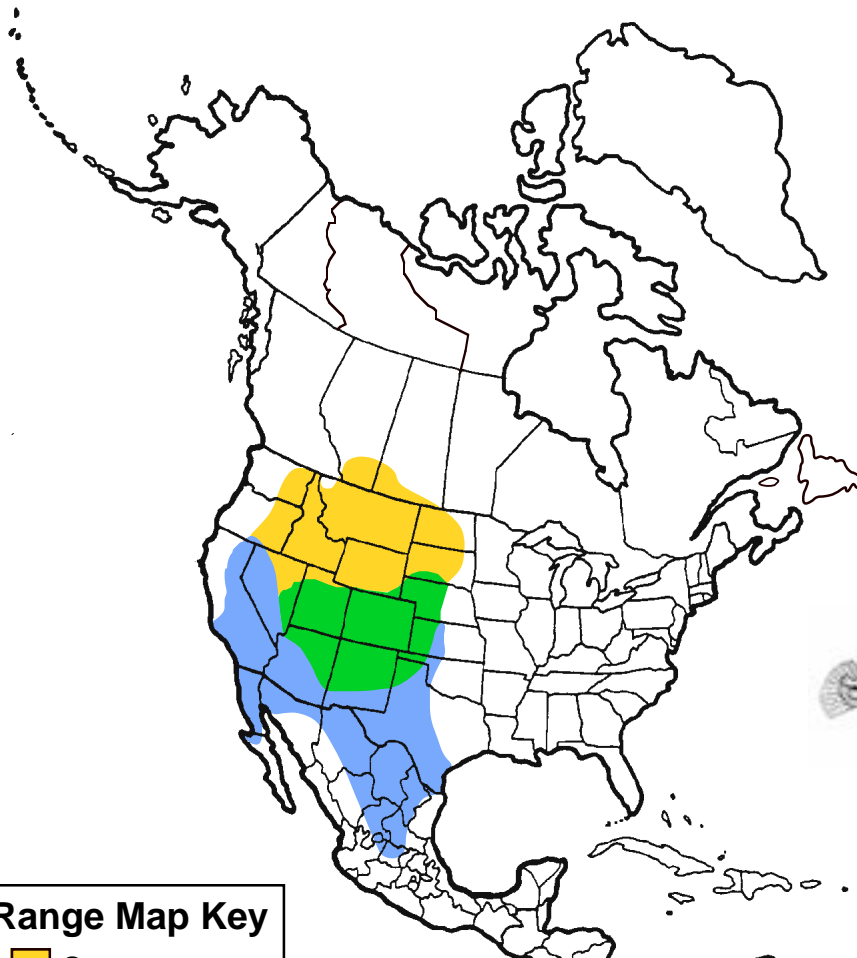
Movement:

Northern birds move south. Many remain in plains states year-round.

Interesting Fact:

Historic partner with the formerly huge numbers of wild bison, or buffalo, of the Great Plains. Ferruginous Hawks built nests using bison bones and lined them with bison dung. May still use cow pies to decorate nests. Were called "Spotted Eagles" by native American plains people for whom they hold great cultural importance.

Range Map: Ferruginous Hawk



Ferruginous Hawk. Copyright © Bauer

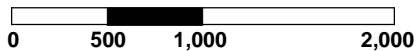


These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

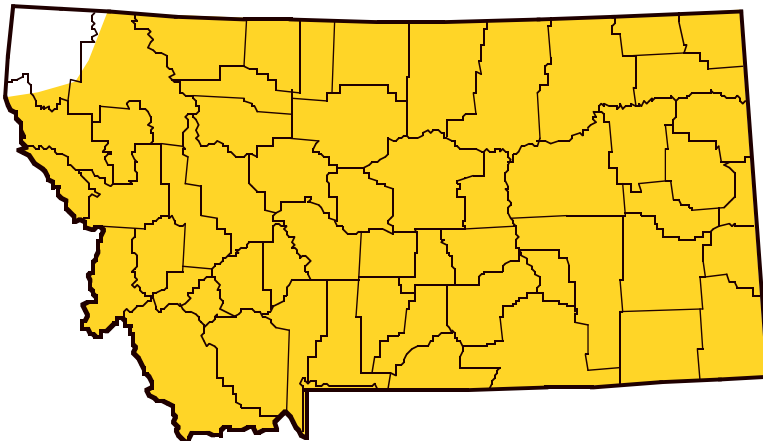
Range Map Key

-  Summer
-  Year-round
-  Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.