

Species Sheets: Merlin



photo by Kate Davis ©

Common name: Merlin

Latin Name: *Falco columbarius*

Field Marks: Length 12 inches
Wing span 25 inches



A stocky little falcon, slightly larger than more common kestrel. Males blue-gray above, females and immatures brown. Darker tail with light bands. Underparts streaked, throat white. Females may be larger than a pigeon, and used to be called Pigeon Hawk because they look like one when they fly.

Habitat:

Northern woodlands across North America (and even Europe and Asia). Open country and forest edge.

Behavior:

Usually solitary. Diet mostly birds caught in mid-air. Fast, direct flight with powerful wing beats. May hunt from perches or cruise low to the ground using trees, shrubs, hills, even houses as cover to dart out and grab prey with feet. May pluck prey at favorite spot. Will chase larger raptors year -round, not just in nesting season. May cache food, or store uneaten portion in hiding spot, to return later.

Nest and eggs:

Uses old stick nests of Black-billed Magpie, sometimes hawk or crow. 4-5 eggs. Male does nearly all hunting for female and young. Young leave nest at one month.

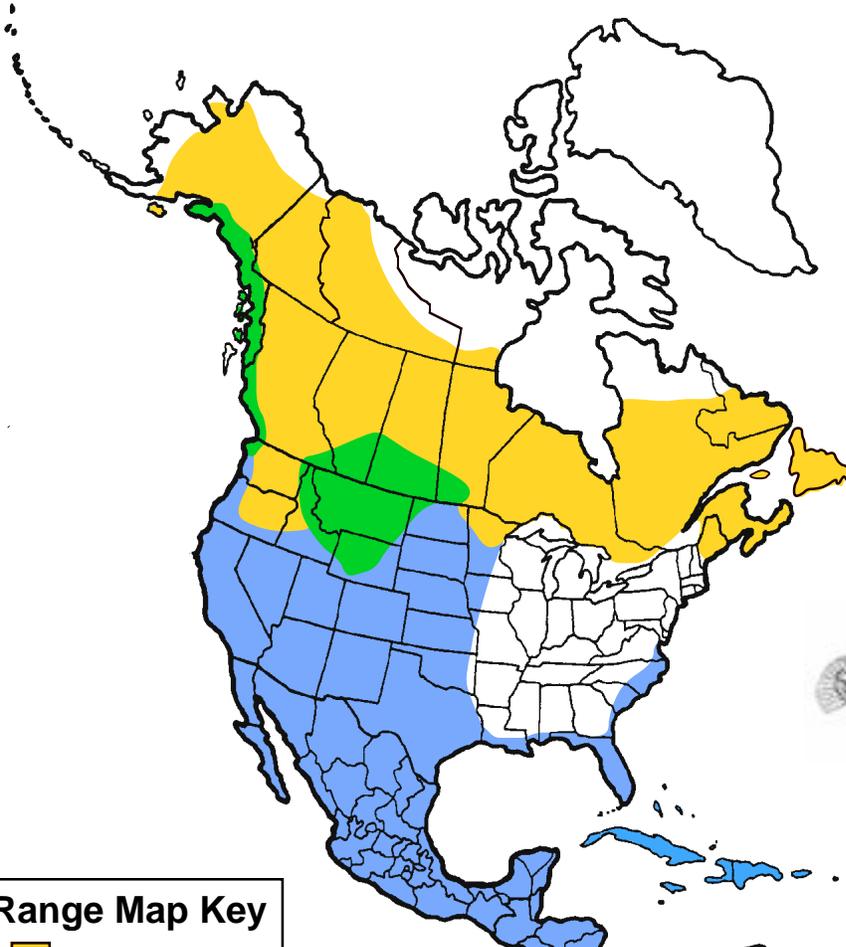
Movement:

Three subspecies, and Canadian or Tiaga Merlin the most migratory, moving south in to Central and South America. Some Prairie Merlins stay all year in cities eating sparrows. Black Merlin of Pacific Coast is generally nonmigratory.

Interesting Fact:

Merlins attracted to birdfeeders, especially when migrating and over winter. Feeders are like smorgasbords or buffets to these birds and allow them to choose prey, often weak members of the flock. Especially fond of Bohemian Waxwings that move into western valleys in huge numbers for the winter.

Range Map: Merlin



Merlin. Copyright © Kate Davis



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

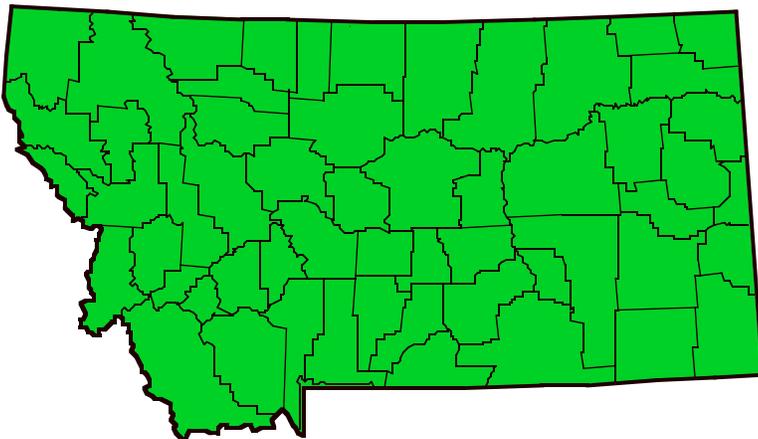
Range Map Key

-  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.