

# Species Sheets: Northern Hawk Owl

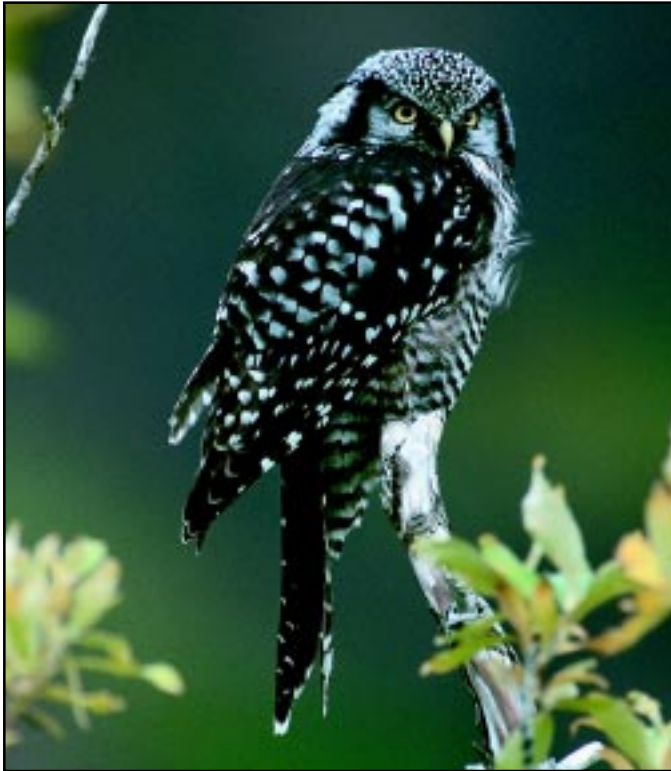


photo by Milo Burcham ©

**Common name:** Northern Hawk Owl

**Latin Name:** *Surnia ulula*

**Field Marks:** Length 16 inches  
Wing Span 28 inches



In northern-most continental U.S. only in winter, but with some breeding records in Montana. Distinctive shape and posture. Medium-sized with long tail, broad, square head with black markings outlining facial disk. Brown above, white with brown bars below. Perch upright and behave like a hawk. Often seen on topmost limbs of tree such as spruce or snag, sometimes with tail cocked up at angle. Wings pointed like falcon in flight. Often easily approached by people.

## Habitat:

Northern forest, coniferous and deciduous with clearings for hunting. Openings often bogs, burned areas, and logged units. May winter in farmland and prairies, perching on haystacks and fence posts.

## Behavior:

Mostly hunts during the day, and crepuscular. Mainly uses sight to locate prey, hearing in deep snow. In breeding season feeds almost entirely on voles, with some snowshoe hares, squirrels, and small to medium-sized birds. More birds in winter. Uses favorite hunting perches to swoop low and fast. May hover.

## Vocalization:

Display call a bubbling trill lasting ten seconds or more, may be imitated using referee's whistle. Also series of whistles.

## Nest and eggs:

Nests in cavity, or broken hollow top of tree. Sometimes stick nest of hawk or crow. 6-10 eggs, larger number in years when vole populations high. Young may stay with parents for several months after fledging

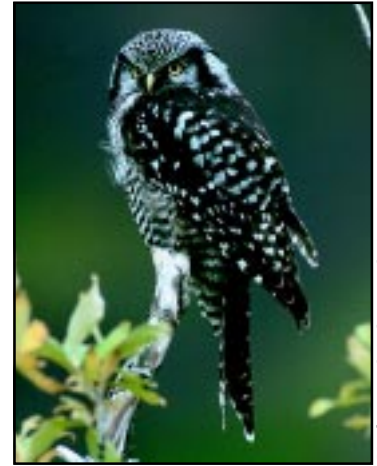
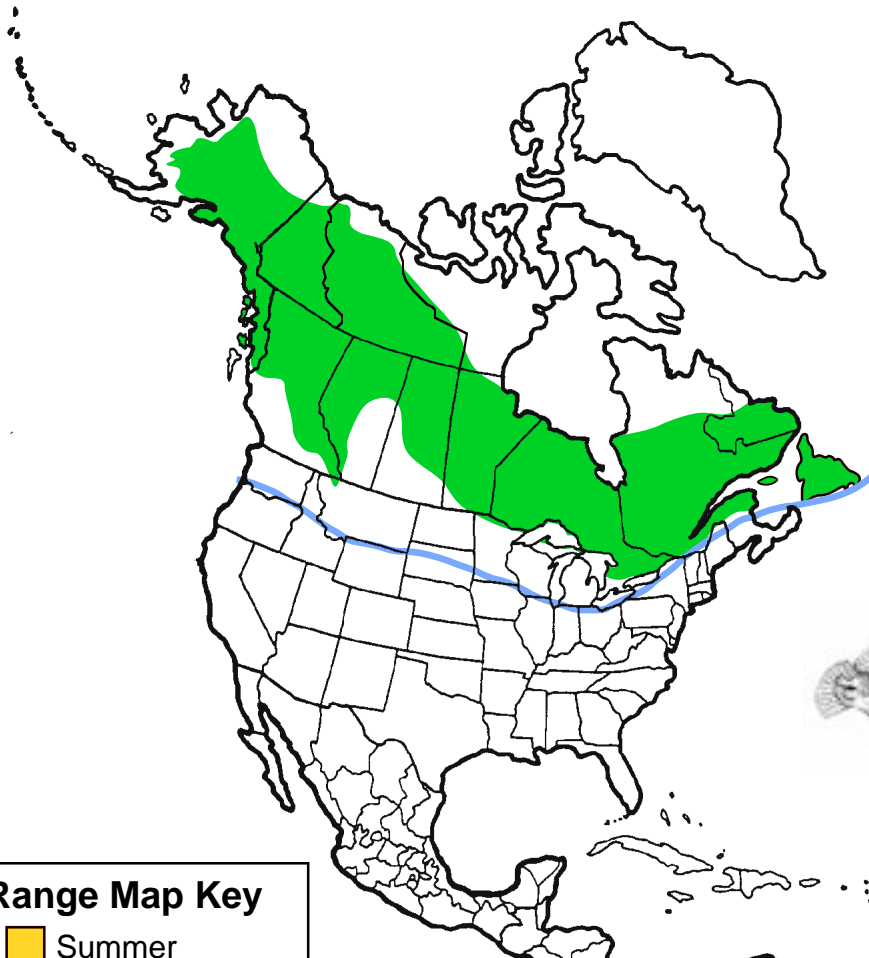
## Movement:

No real migration, and nomadic like Great Gray. When vole numbers crash every 4 or 5 years, Hawk Owls move south for winter seeking prey, especially juvenile birds. These are called years of "irruptions". Adult males may remain on breeding grounds to secure the scarce nesting cavities.

## Interesting Fact:

Northern Hawk Owl may benefit from logging and fires. Habitat improves with small units logged over time, associated with patches of forest. By leaving snags and stumps, these areas may be occupied year-round. They also seem to prefer recent burns.

# Range Map: Northern Hawk Owl



Northern Hawk Owl, Copyright © Milo Burcham



Raptors of the Rockies



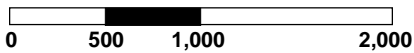
Montana Audubon

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

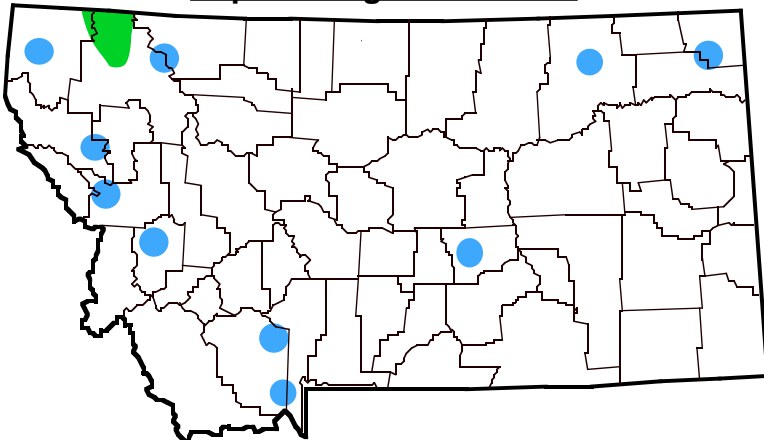
## Range Map Key

-  Summer
-  Year-round
-  Winter
-  Southern limits of winter range

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



## Raptor Range in Montana



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