

# Species Sheets: *Prairie Falcon*



photo by Kate Davis ©

**Common name:** Prairie Falcon

**Latin Name:** *Falco mexicanus*

**Field Marks:** Length 15 1/2-19 1/2 inches  
Wing span 35-43 inches



**L**arge pale brown falcon of open country, with rusty upperparts and light underneath with dark spots on adult, and streaks or bars on immature. Dark axillar, or armpit, feathers tell a Prairie from a Peregrine; both about the same size. On head, a white stripe above the eye and one behind the mustache stripe mean Prairie.

## Habitat:

The arid West, and open country with cliffs for nesting.

## Behavior:

These birds experts in both ground and aerial prey. Will take on abundant ground squirrels all summer, then switch to birds in the air, such as Horned Larks in winter months. Low flying tactics surprise both.

## Nest and eggs:

On a cliff or ledge, and look for the “whitewash” or bird feces to mark the exact location of a falcon eyrie, or nest. Will make a scrape or indentation on a ledge to lay 4-5 eggs. Occasionally use old Common Raven or Golden Eagle nests, and maybe a high cutbank in a waterway.

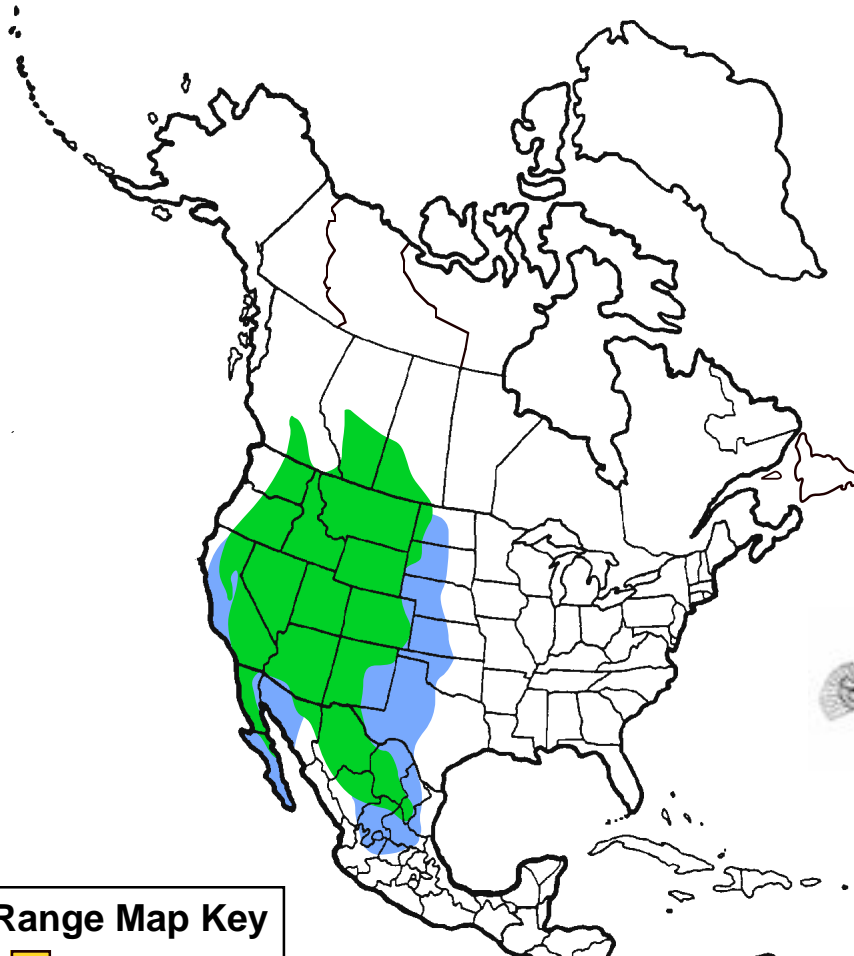
## Movement:

Young move in all directions-north, south, east, west-after being kicked out of breeding grounds by parent birds. Winter hunting ranges are often quite large.

## Interesting Fact:

Prairie Falcons did not suffer the same population declines as the result of DDT poisoning as their cousins the Peregrines. Birds and fish hold more poisons than mammals due to biomagnification, the tendency for the concentration of toxic substances to increase as one moves up the food chain. Rodents eat vegetation (short food chain), whereas many birds feed on insects that have eaten other invertebrates and so on (long food chain). Prairie Falcons were spared due to their largely mammalian diet of ground squirrels all summer. But Prairie Falcons switch to a largely bird diet over the winter after the squirrels have hibernated.

# Range Map: Prairie Falcon



Prairie Falcon, Copyright © Kate Davis

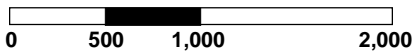


These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

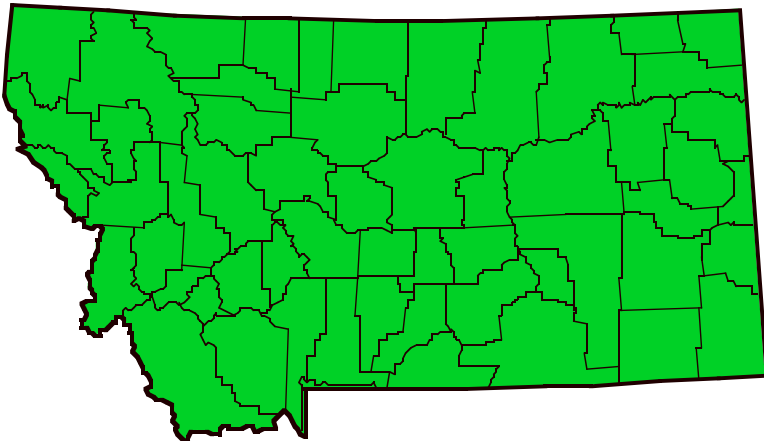
## Range Map Key

-  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.