

Species Sheets: Northern Pygmy-Owl



photo by Milo Burcham ©

Common name: Northern Pygmy-Owl

Latin Name: *Glaucidium gnoma*

Field Marks: Length 6 3/4 inches
Wing span 12 inches



Tiny, plump, with round head and long tail, short wings. Gray and rufous color morphs, grayer in Rocky Mountains. Dark and spotted above, streaked below. Flanks, or sides streaked with black. Tail dark with many light bars. Two black spots on back of head resemble eyes. True eyes are relatively small and yellow. Flight noisy, with fast wing beats and gliding. Often very tame and approachable.

Habitat:

Deciduous and coniferous woodlands. Forest edge. Seems to prefer openings rather than dense forest.

Behavior:

Very powerful for size. Feeds on small to medium sized birds, mammals, reptiles. Some large insects, depending on time of year. Can kill quail and red squirrels, both more than two times owl's weight. Diurnal and crepuscular. May fly from perch to perch to get closer to prey, then drop straight down. Flicks tail side to side. May frequent bird feeders, especially in winter. Often "caches" or hides uneaten part of prey to return later.

Vocalization:

A long series of short hoots or whistles equally spaced at 1-2 seconds.

Nest and eggs:

Cavity nester. 2-7 eggs. Unusual for owls in that female may wait until whole clutch is laid before starts incubating, so young may be same age. Female may start hunting for young at 9 days, fledging as soon as 23 days.

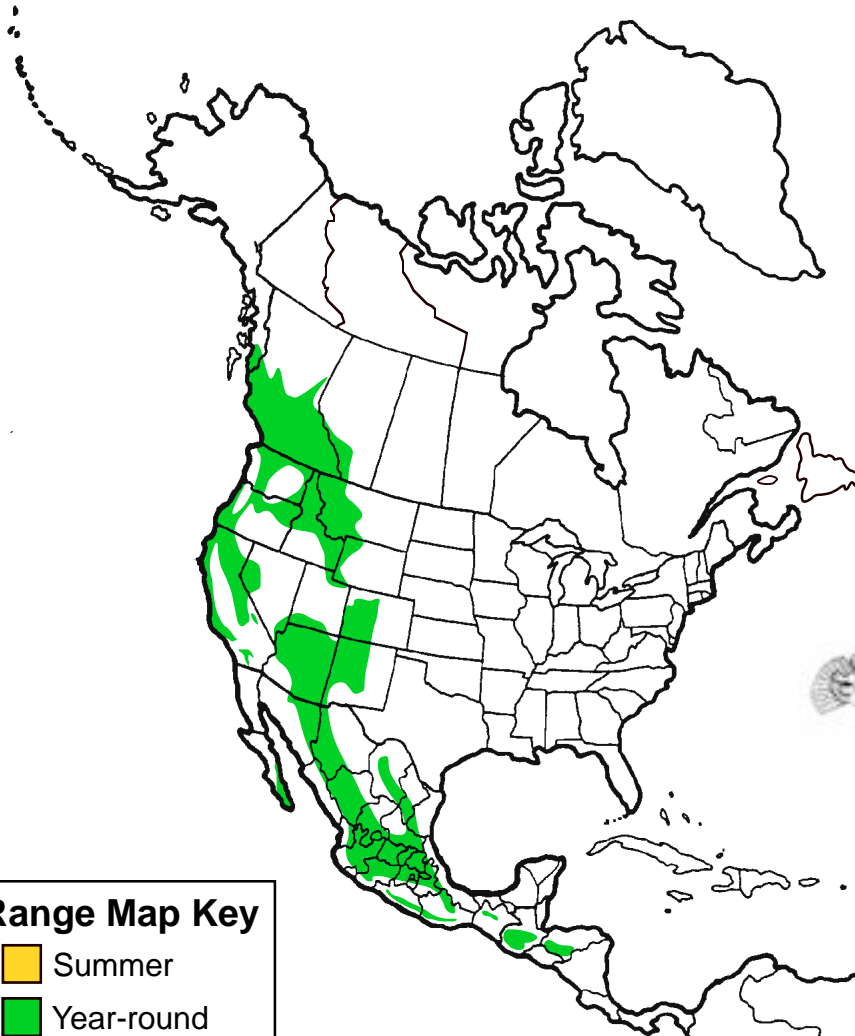
Movement:

Resident year-round. Movement from mountains to valleys with milder climate (and bird feeders) for winter.

Interesting Fact:

On back of head, markings may resemble a false face. Two black spots surrounded by white with a hint of a beak shape. Advantage is that predators that would want to attack pygmy-owl or steal its prey aren't sure which way the owl is looking. Owl can accentuate the "eyes" and make them look larger. The element of surprise is lost for the potential attacker.

Range Map: Northern Pygmy-Owl



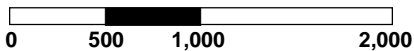
Northern Pygmy-Owl, Copyright © Milo Burcham



Range Map Key

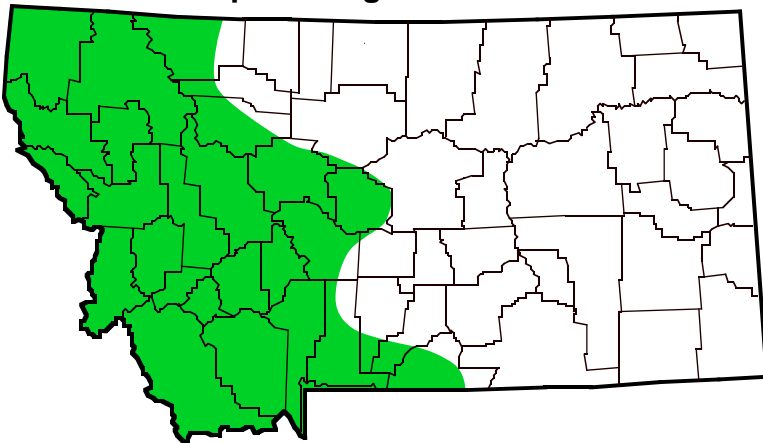
- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



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

Raptor Range in Montana



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