

Species Sheets: Gyrfalcon



photo by Kate Davis ©

Common name: Gyrfalcon

Latin Name: *Falco rusticolus*

Field Marks: Length 20-25 inches
Wing span 50-64 inches



Largest falcon in world. Three color morphs, gray being the most common, plus white and nearly black. Young with brown markings and bluish skin around eye, beak, and feet. Adults may be gray with dark markings, with yellow skin and feet. Relatively long tail. About the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. The national bird of Iceland. Circumpolar, or living in arctic regions across North America, Eurasia, Greenland.

Habitat:

Rare winter visitor from arctic tundra only in winter. Open country such as farmland.

Behavior:

Feeds on birds like grouse, pheasants and ducks, often taken on ground and water. May scan countryside from power poles. Powerful, swift, and direct flight. May fly up and take prey from above in short stoop from above. A spectacular flyer.

Nest and eggs:

Like other large falcons, nest on cliffs with some overhanging protection, relatively safe from mammal predators. Sometimes use stick cliff nests

of Common Ravens, Rough-legged Hawks, and Golden Eagles. Usually 3-4 eggs.

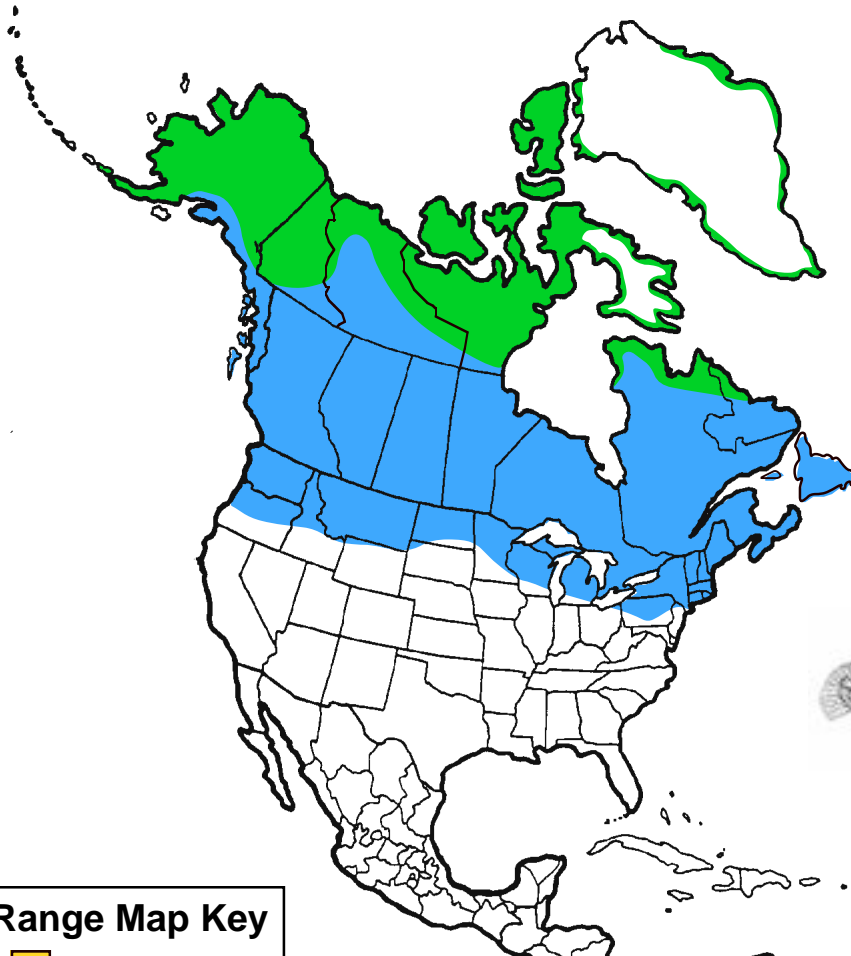
Movement:

Migrants are mostly young first-year birds and adult females. Males sometimes stay on breeding ground over winter and hunt in arctic darkness. Only reach the very northern edge of lower 48 states, but some years make it to central U.S.

Interesting Fact:

Gyrfalcons have long history in the 4,000-year-old sport of falconry. During the Middle Ages in Europe, only kings could keep a Gyr. Sign of importance or status was a white phase. Today birds are often bred in captivity, even with Peregrine falcons creating a hybrid, or cross between species. These birds are valued by falconers for having the best qualities of each species for hunting. Larger numbers of young may be produced by removing the first clutch of eggs. The female will often lay a replacement clutch after about two weeks.

Range Map: Gyrfalcon



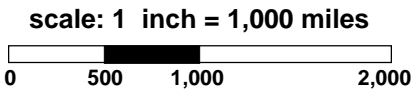
Gyrfalcon. Copyright © Kate Davis



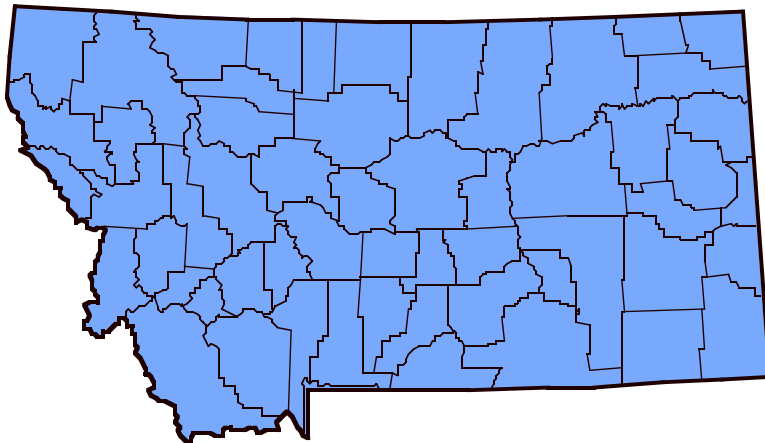
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



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