

Species Sheets: Northern Goshawk



photo by Milo Burcham ©

Common name: Northern Goshawk

Latin Name: *Accipiter gentilis*

Field Marks: Length 21-26 inches
Wing span 40-46 inches



The largest of the accipiters. Females the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. Adult plumage of both sexes very distinctive with fine gray bars on the breast and belly, with slate gray backs and black bands on the long tail. Juveniles brown. All ages have white eyebrow or “superciliary line” over eye that may distinguish them from smaller Cooper’s Hawk. May soar each day, especially the males during breeding season showing off territory, but usually secretive birds. Females especially very defensive around nest and may attack people.

Habitat:

Mature and old-growth forest, usually coniferous, but can be in deciduous and mixed. Remote wilderness areas in northern U.S. Prefers openings, clearings, and forest edges for hunting. Species lives across Northern Hemisphere with eight subspecies.

Behavior:

Wide variety of prey. Birds of all sizes including grouse, and mammals like ground squirrels, tree squirrels, and snowshoe hares. May hunt from a perch or cruise forest and forest edge. Prey mainly caught on ground.

Nest and eggs:

Nest near trunk in tall trees. Bulky stick nest often used year after year. Uses more green limbs and sprigs than any other North American raptor. 3-4 eggs.

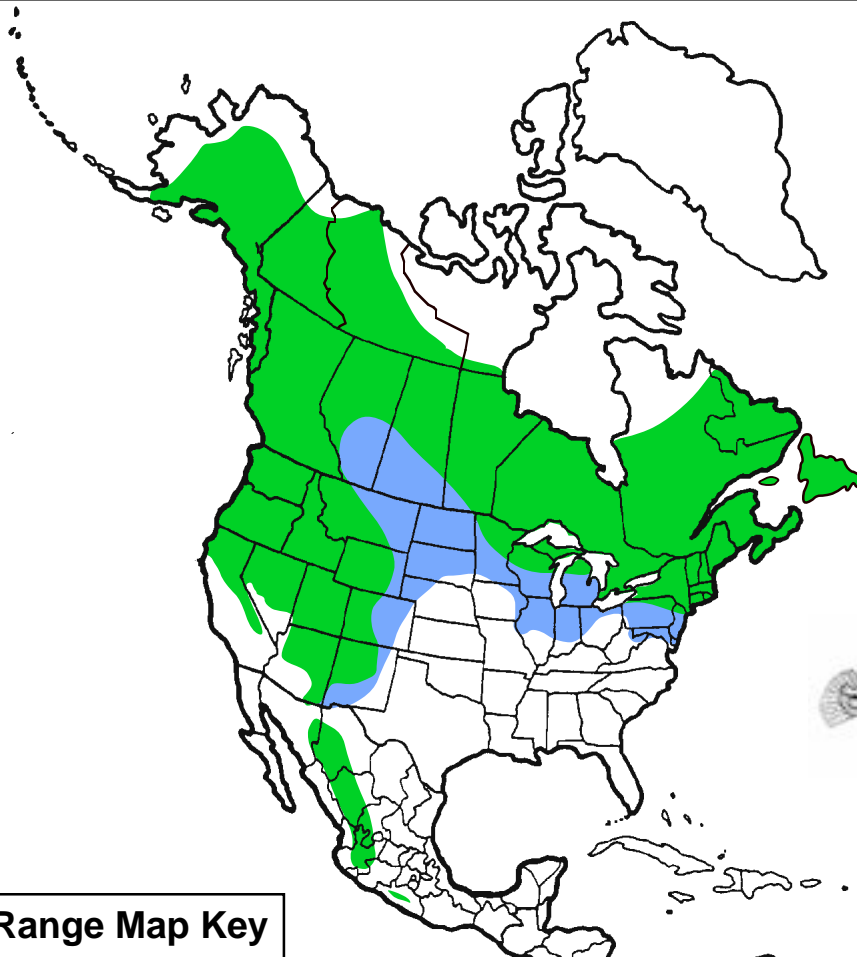
Movement :

Usually stay in hunting areas year-round. Goshawks in the far north Canada and Alaska migrate south in October and November to return in spring.

Interesting Fact:

The snowshoe hare is an important prey. It goes through cycles where the population steadily rises then crashes about every 10 years. Goshawk breeding success also declines with the loss of hares, and their movements into the southern U.S. in the winter in search of food are also in these 10-year cycles. Shows how one species may be affected by another.

Range Map: Northern Goshawk



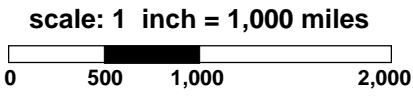
Northern Goshawk, Copyright © Milo Burcham



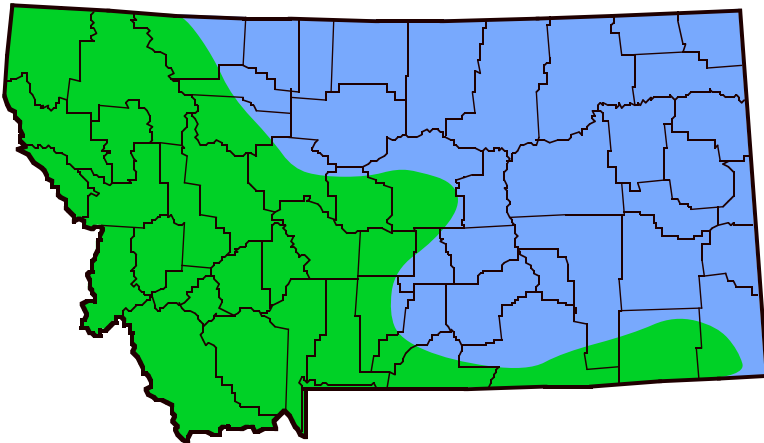
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



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