

Species Sheets: Northern Saw-whet Owl

photo by Milo Burcham ©



Common name: Northern Saw-whet Owl

Latin Name: *Aegolius acadicus*

Field Marks: Length 8 inches
Wing span 17 inches



Small, reddish-brown above, white below with soft reddish markings. Round head with white streaks, yellow eyes, black beak. Facial disk light without black border. Juvenile overall red through the first summer into fall. When detected may pull wing forward just under beak, like a vampire's cloak. Easily approached and may even be picked up.

Habitat:

Coniferous forest. Also deciduous, mixed, streamside groves in arid areas. Requires thick cover for roosting.

Behavior:

Diet of mostly deer mice, plus voles, shrews, , some insects like beetles. Small birds, especially as they roost at night. Capable of killing prey larger than themselves. Nocturnal, but occasional diurnal foraging. Hunts from low perch, often in clearing or forest edge. Roosts in dense foliage, usually around 12 feet from ground, often far out on limb rather than next to trunk. Caches uneaten portions of prey or whole prey to return to later.

Vocalization:

Quiet except during breeding season of March to May, but may call in fall as well. Male whistles short,

clear note repeated over and over again, often for hours without a break. About 130 notes per minute. Female's song softer.

Nest and eggs:

Cavity nester, favoring holes of Northern Flicker and Pileated Woodpecker. Uses nest boxes. 5-7 eggs. All feeding of female and young by male. Female leaves nest at to roost elsewhere when youngest is about 18 days old. She may feed them or depart. Continued feeding by male up to a month after fledging. Young may remain together during this time. Probably no permanent pair bonding. Seldom uses same nest site two years in a row.

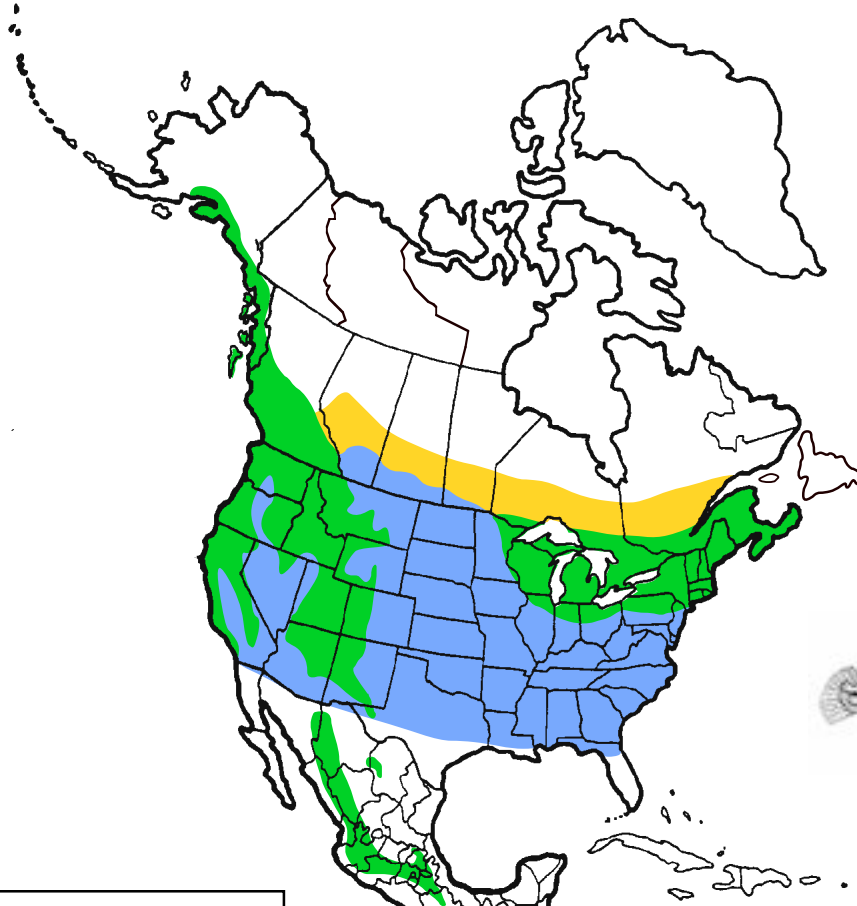
Movement:

Some remain on breeding ground year-round, but northern breeders are highly migratory. May move in to central and southern U.S., Mexico. Others move from mountains to valleys. Migrates at night.

Interesting Fact:

Gets its name from their contact call. The "scree-awe" sound was compared to the sharpening, or whetting, of a saw blade. Audubon described it as "filing the teeth of a large saw", a sound that was far more common when this bird was named.

Range Map: Northern Saw-whet Owl



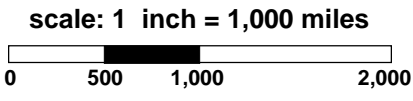
Northern Saw-whet Owl, Copyright © Milo Burcham



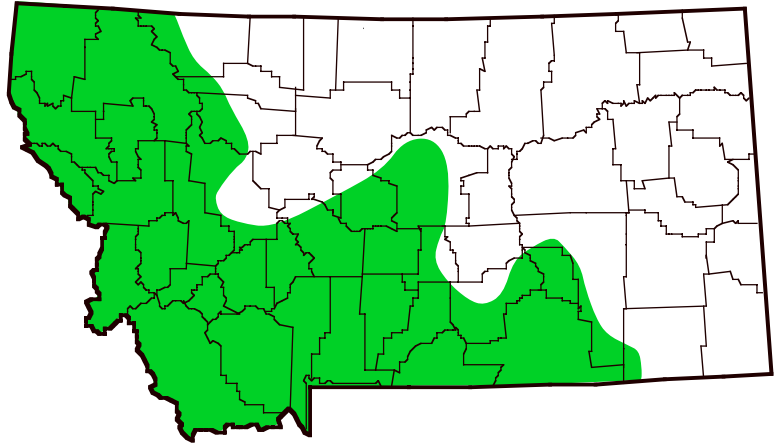
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



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