

Species Sheets: Osprey



photo by Milo Burcham ©

Common name: Osprey

Latin Name: *Pandion haliaetus*

Field Marks: Length 22-25 inches
Wing span 58-72 inches



The “Fish Hawk” that lives nearly everywhere in the world where water occurs. Large long-winged, brown above and creamy white below. White head with dark stripe through eye. Female usually has neckace of dark feathers. Immature has buffy edges to feathers. In flight wings bend back at wrist and look like two shallow arches when soaring. Called the “citizen of the world.”

Habitat:

Rivers, lakes, ponds, reservoirs, and marshes. Accustomed to people, so even in urban areas. Anywhere that fish may be found near the surface.

Behavior:

Feeds entirely on live fish, catching them in a headfirst dive then swinging out legs, often going completely underwater. Outer toe moves behind to grab fish with two toes in front, two behind. Scales on toes are spikey with “spicules” to better grasp slippery prey. Often hovers, or flaps to stay in place and locate prey. Prefers “rough fish” like suckers and squaw fish. Male provides all food for brooding female then young.

Nest and eggs:

Large stick nests on snags, power poles, and human-made platforms. Material added year after year by males breaking off dead limbs in flight from standing trees. May decorate nest with harmful material like fishing netting, baling twine. Nearly always two young are raised, rarely three. Power pole nests are safe from ground predators, but not from Great Horned Owls

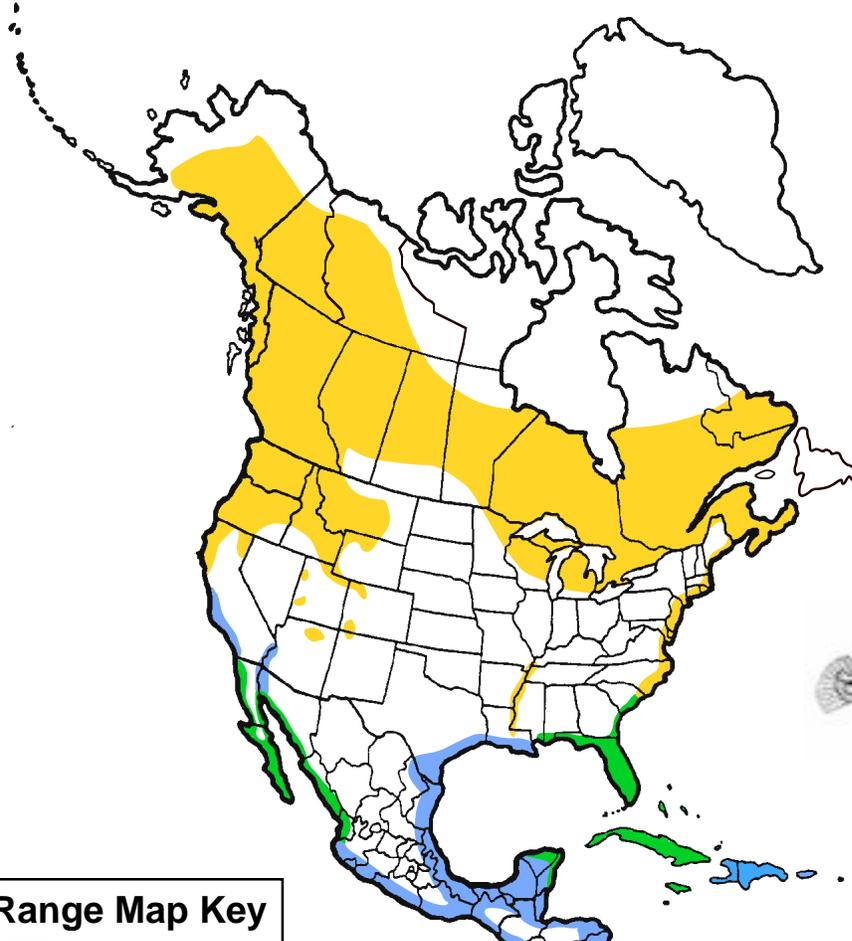
Movement:

Long-distance migrant. First adults, then youngsters fly south in September. Will fly across large bodies of water unlike other raptors. Winter in southern Central and northern South America. Young remain near wintering grounds until old enough to breed at three years. Adults return in spring to same nest, and young eventually show up in area in which they were raised.

Interesting Fact:

One species, the Osprey lives all around the world (except Antarctica). Next to the Peregrine Falcon this is the most widely distributed diurnal raptor. Were thought to be in a family of their own, now considered by many to be a subfamily of the Accipitridae.

Range Map: Osprey



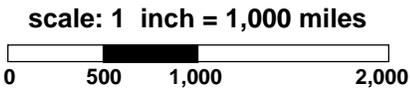
Osprey, Copyright © Milo Burcham



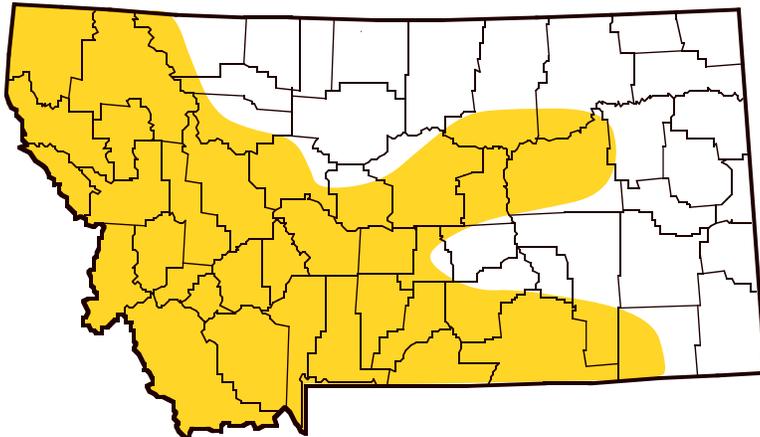
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

- Summer
- Year-round
- Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



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