

Species Sheets: Great Horned Owl



photo by Kate Davis ©

Common name: Great Horned Owl

Latin Name: *Bubo virginianus*

Field Marks: Length 22 inches
Wing span 44 inches



Large powerful owl. Can vary in color from rich dark-brown to sandy tan in arid country. Bulky, with ear tufts that may help in camouflage when roosting. But ear tufts may be lowered making head look flat. White throat area with dark patches below. Yellow eyes with bluish-gray beak. Facial disk light to dark orange.

Habitat:

Lives nearly *everywhere* except very dense forest and treeless prairie. No other owl in North America lives in so many habitats and climates. Woodlands, open country, farmland, desert, mountains, swamps.

Behavior:

Generalists in feeding. Always take advantage of easy prey, no matter what the size. Feed on earthworms, insects, crayfish, fish, reptiles and amphibians, birds. Large portion of diet is mammals from shrews, mice, voles, on up to squirrels, rabbits and hares, even skunks and porcupines. Kills many other species of owls and hawks. Mostly nocturnal, hunting from high perches. Mobbled by crows and other songbirds if seen during day. Small birds are warning that a predator is in area, so be aware.

Vocalization:

Loud, deep hoots in five-seven syllable series that may be like “Don’t Kill Owls, Save Owls”. Male more vocal, fewer hoots with deeper voice than female. People can attract GHO by imitating call in late winter where they breed.

Nest and eggs:

Nest as early as January. Usually have several nests sites from which to choose. Old broken-off snags, stick nests of hawks, crows, herons, sometimes rocky cliffs. 1-3 eggs, usually 2. May pair for life, but will accept another mate if one is killed. Young kicked out of territory in fall by adults, and must seek their own hunting grounds.

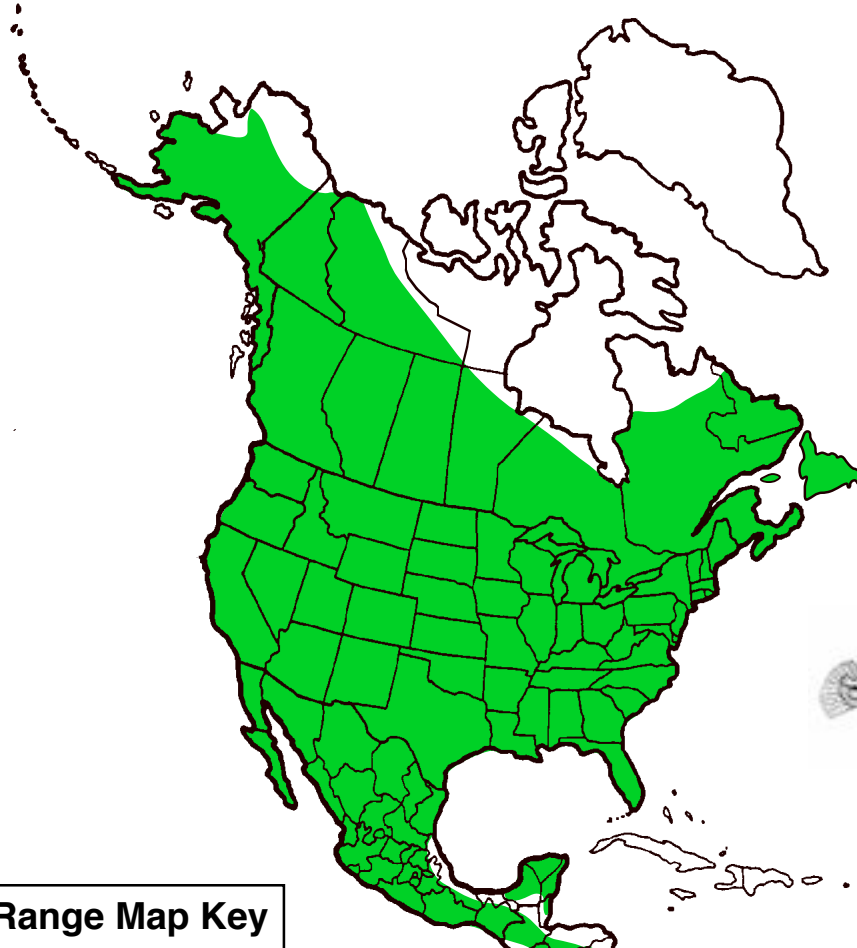
Movement:

Non-migratory and remain on territory year-round.

Interesting Fact:

Most common owl in North America, and also largest by weight aside from the Snowy Owl, which doesn’t actually breed in the lower 48 states. May be most successful of our raptors. This may be due to their generalist diet and tolerance of people.

Range Map: Great Horned Owl






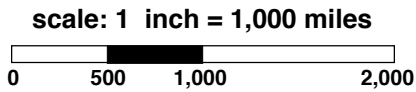
Great-horned Owl, Copyright © Kate Dancis



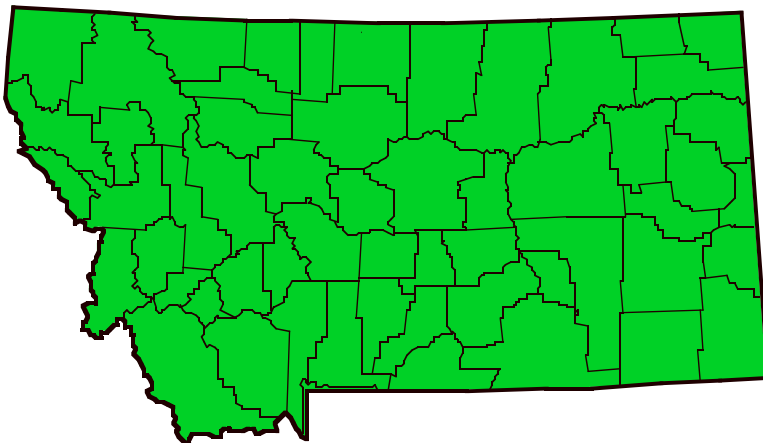
These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

Range Map Key

-  Summer
-  Year-round
-  Winter



Raptor Range in Montana



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