



A Field Guide to  
**RAPTORS**  
of the Northwest Territories



Government of  
Northwest Territories

This identification guide includes all species of raptors known to be present in the Northwest Territories.

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**COVER PHOTO:**  
American Kestrel by  
Gordon Court

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# NWT Raptor Species Checklist

The list is organized by Order, then Family.

## ACCIPITRIFORMES

### CATHARTIDAE

- **Turkey Vulture** (*Cathartes aura*) (this species is a vagrant)

### PANDIONIDAE

- **Osprey** (*Pandion haliaetus*)

### ACCIPITRIDAE

- **Bald Eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)
- **Golden Eagle** (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
- **Northern Goshawk** (*Accipiter gentilis*)
- **Sharp-shinned Hawk** (*Accipiter striatus*)
- **Cooper's Hawk** (*Accipiter cooperii*) (this species is a vagrant)
- **Northern Harrier** (*Circus hudsonius*, syn. *Circus cyaneus hudsonius*)
- **Red-tailed Hawk** (*Buteo jamaicensis*)
- **Rough-legged Hawk** (*Buteo lagopus*)
- **Broad-winged Hawk** (*Buteo platypterus*)
- **Swainson's Hawk** (*Buteo swainsoni*)

## FALCONIDAE

- **American Kestrel** (*Falco sparverius*)
- **Merlin** (*Falco columbarius*)
- **Peregrine Falcon** (*Falco peregrinus*)
- **Gyrfalcon** (*Falco rusticolus*)

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# Raptors in the NWT

Raptors are predatory birds that hunt and capture live prey. Some species will also feed on remains of dead animals (carrion). Raptors can often be distinguished by their sharp talons and hooked beaks, which are used for grasping and tearing into their food. Included in this grouping of birds are ospreys, eagles, harriers, hawks, vultures and falcons.

Raptors play an important role in our ecosystems. As predators, raptors regulate prey populations and are an essential component of our northern biodiversity. Raptors also have a significant spiritual role and have been an emblem of strength, courage and freedom. The NWT official bird is a raptor: the gyrfalcon!

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## Where to Find Them

Raptors are a common sight in many places around the NWT, sometimes year-round. They occur in every habitat. Each map in this booklet shows where a particular species has been recorded in the past.

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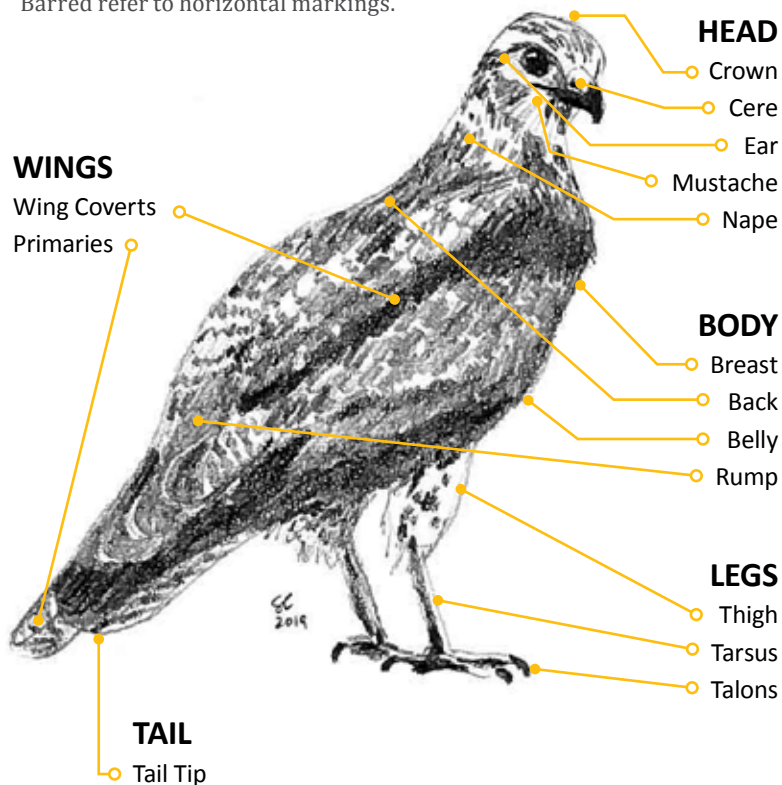
## How to Become a Better Birder

**VIEWING TIPS:** Bird watching is about being patient and waiting for the bird. Birds are easily startled by sudden movements and loud noises. If you would like to get a closer viewing of a bird, use binoculars or move slowly and quietly.

Each raptor is adapted to a particular habitat. Study their habitat. Wear clothing that blends into the background.

# Raptor Anatomy

Streaked refer to vertical markings;  
Barred refer to horizontal markings.



# How to Identify Raptors

Raptors seem easy to identify, but clearly identifying a species is notoriously difficult. Sometimes, birds are seen only for a fleeting moment, or are flying very high in the sky. Juvenile birds of one species can uncannily resemble the adults of another. Then, like people with different hair colours and outfits, raptors can have “morphs” wherein birds of the same species can differ in plumage patterns and colour.

How can some birders distinguish females from males? Females of each raptor species are larger than males. With practice, this size difference will be easier to determine. Experts think the female size difference is an adaptation that allows each member of a breeding pair to share a hunting area without competing for prey, as one can take larger prey species than the other. Another theory is linked to female roles in the pair. Females invest more time during incubation and larger females will be more successful in defending a nest against predators, either from the air or ground.

## **The Audubon Society gives us great tips to help identify our raptors.**

- Relax and do not jump to conclusion about a species right away.
- Be humble as the species of distant raptors may be impossible to identify.
- Focus on traits you can make out: habitat, shape, motion pattern or wing beats, then general colour or tone, and voice.
- Make a mental list of a possible few species and add clues that eliminate one species at a time.
- The remaining species is (are) the most probable one(s) you have seen.
- If you have photos, share them with people and get their opinions.

The following are the main traits to look for. This booklet is organized using these groups. Look for more clues in the species pages. This guide has many examples of photos that capture traits to help identify raptor species found in the NWT.

# Shape and Motion

Group	Overall	Tail	Wings	In Motion
Vultures (vagrant)	Super-size	Big but looks tucked in. Head looks tucked in too.	Big	Will glide for hours with wings in a “V”
Osprey	Large but slender (skinny as fed on fish)	Narrow	Narrow but not pointy	Forms an “M” pattern with bent wrist
Eagles	Super-size	Big and often in a fan	Big	Will glide for hours
<i>Accipiter</i> Hawks and Northern Harrier	Medium -Small	Narrow to steer in forests	Short	Rapid burst of flapping, followed by a glide
<i>Buteo</i> Hawks	Broad-chested	Short	Short	Spare laboured wing beats
Falcons	Slender	Fast-looking	Pointy for speed, (sitting) wings as long as the tail	Fast, powerful, shallow, elastic wing beats

## Report your Sightings

Please report your list of bird species to e-bird (<https://ebird.org/canada/home>). You can also load your photographs on iNaturalist.ca, where other bird enthusiasts will be able to assist you in confirming the species you have observed. Report any new species, or new range extension. Send a photograph to [wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca](mailto:wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca) or even share it on the Facebook group “**NWT Species**”. Detailed instructions on how to photograph and record sightings of raptors are also available by contacting us at [wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca](mailto:wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca).



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# How to Use This Guide

## Species Pages

Species pages follow the checklist at the beginning of this booklet, grouped by Order then Family. Full species pages for vagrant species are not included in this guide but are referenced.

### Each page will have:

- Common name, species scientific name
- Range map in the NWT
- Body size – ranges where lower value applies mostly to males, the top value to females
- Traits
- Food
- Habitat
- Breeding periods in the NWT
- Similar species

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## Threats to Raptors

Many raptor populations declined prior to the 1970s due to use of pesticides, such as DDT. Since many countries have banned these types of pesticides, raptor populations have rebounded, demonstrating that environmental damage can be reversed. Ongoing monitoring is required to ensure any impacts of new threats are promptly identified and addressed.

Additional threats to raptors that can cause declines include loss of habitat in stopover areas during migration or on wintering grounds, pollution, new types of pesticides, persecution, and collisions with vehicles and man-made structures, such as wind mills.

In addition, the complex effects of a warming climate on our raptors are not well understood. For example, in peregrine falcons, the most studied species of raptors in the NWT, there is evidence that the species is nesting earlier with each decade, presumably responding to climate change. There is also evidence that increased black fly and other insect harassments during brood-rearing period are leading to the mortality of peregrine falcon chicks. How climate change is affecting other species is unknown.

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## Conservation of Raptors

In the NWT, the *Wildlife Act* protects raptor habitat, nesting sites, eggs and the individual birds. Raptors are particularly vulnerable to disturbance during the breeding period. Breeding periods will differ for each species, and will vary by latitude (species located further north will start nesting later than the same species at more southern latitudes). Information about breeding periods for each species is given in the species pages. More detailed information is available in a report referenced at the end of the booklet. Remember, raptor nesting sites are protected by law, even in winter.

Across Canada, there have been programs established to recover declining raptor populations. Captive breeding programs have aided in doubling or tripling some raptor populations. Nesting programs in major Canadian cities have improved recovery of declining populations.

Many raptors are beginning to adapt to life in urban environments where they are becoming more common – partially due to large populations of prey species and human-built nesting structures.

# Species Information

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Cathartidae

## Turkey Vulture

*Cathartes aura*



This bird is a rare vagrant in the NWT. They have been recorded only seven times, at the East Arm of Great Slave Lake (1989), Fort McPherson (2001), Paulatuk (2011), Wrigley (2012), Behchokò (2014), Norman Wells (2016) and Fort Providence (2017) (Britton et al. 2019).

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Cooper's Hawk

*Accipiter cooperii*



Gordon Court

This bird is a very rare vagrant in the NWT. They have been confirmed and recorded in 2014 in the Fort Liard area using a call recorder verified by experts. No visual reports are confirmed (Britton et al. 2019).



Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Pandionidae

## Osprey

*Pandion haliaetus*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 1,400-2,000 grams

**Body length:** 54-58 cm

**Wing Span:** 150-180 cm

**Traits:** large body but slender, with dark brown back with white belly; white head; dark eye stripe; long narrow wings. When flying, they usually hold their wings with a kink in the wrist forming an “M”. Wings have marked black wrist area. Females have dark striping on their neck. Tail has stripes and terminal black band. Juveniles have dark streaks on neck.

**Food:** Fish.

**Habitat:** Fairly uncommon as migrant and breeder in our forested regions.

**Nest:** Stick nests on trees, tall rocks or artificial structures, such as electrical poles. They will nest on the ground only if the location is free of ground predators. Tree nests occur at the tops of trees with nothing overhead. Ospreys prefer nests located near water. They will renovate and re-use a nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Mid-May to first week of September.

**Similar species:** Easily confused with bald eagles but are identified by their white underparts. Ospreys also have a black eye stripe that goes down the side of their face.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Eagles can soar for hours using wind currents and use thermal convection currents to migrate in the winter.*

Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Accipitridae

## Bald Eagle

*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 3,000-6,300 grams

**Body length:** 71-96 cm

**Wing Span:** 200 cm

**Traits:** Very large with white head and tail, body blackish-brown, and wings broad and flat. Legs and large hooked bills are bright yellow. Bald eagles make a high-pitched squawking sound. Juveniles are very large but with dark heads and body colouring until they are about five years old.

**Food:** Mainly fish, carrion and roadkill. Eagles also eat smaller birds, rodents, waterfowl and gulls.

**Habitat:** Common migrant and breeder in the NWT. Likes large lakes and will nest in tall trees or on cliffs near lakes, rivers and marshes.

**Nest:** Large stick nests in a large tree with branches capable of holding the nest. Eagles will often nest in the upper section of trees, but not at the very top. They will build a nest on the ground on tundra. They will renovate and re-use a nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Last week of April to third week of September.

**Similar species:** Juvenile bald eagles may be confused with golden eagles. Both have white feathers under the wings and at base of tail. The juvenile bald eagle has a white chest and belly, making them appear mottled. The golden eagle's body is brown or dark.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Golden eagles use display flights to show territory, reducing the need for physical confrontations with other golden eagles.*



Order: Accipitriformes  
 Family: Accipitridae

## Golden Eagle

*Aquila chrysaetos*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 3,000-6,100 grams

**Body length:** 70-84 cm

**Wing Span:** 180-220 cm

**Traits:** Very large, with dark brown body and a tan or pale brown wash over back of head and neck. There is faint banding on the tail. The golden eagle has a weak, high shrill but prefers to be silent. Juveniles have a white patch underwing and white tail base.

**Food:** Small mammals, birds, carrion, fish and occasionally caribou calves.

**Habitat:** Uncommon, but can be observed migrating in the southern NWT and breeding on our tundra, in our mountains and other open areas.

**Nest:** Large stick nests on cliff ledges, in large trees, as well as on ground, steep river or lake banks, and on sturdy and large human-made structures, such as transmission towers. Will renovate and re-use a nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Second week of April to last week of August.

**Similar species:** The golden eagle can be confused with the vagrant turkey vulture. To distinguish between the two, look at the flight patterns. Golden eagles fly holding their wings firmly in a flat or shallow "V" shape, called a dihedral angle, whereas turkey vulture flight is less controlled with a more pronounced "V". Turkey vultures also have a thinner body, small head and dark-brown wings with a clear pale area. Juvenile golden eagles can be confused with juvenile bald eagles. The former has well-defined white markings and looks less motley than the latter.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Northern goshawks are not tolerant to nest disruption. Keep a good distance as these hawks will attack if you stray too close to the nest tree.*

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Northern Goshawk

*Accipiter gentilis*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 631-1,364 grams

**Body length:** 53-64 cm

**Wing Span:** 103-117 cm



**Traits:** Largest of the Accipiters, northern goshawks can appear bulky. They have short legs and their narrow tail has black and white bands. They have broad rounded wings with white underwings with barred primaries. The underparts on adults are finely barred in dark grey. Adults also have bold white eyebrow stripes over striking orange-red eyes. Northern goshawks chatter a repeated note during courtship and nesting period. Juveniles are dark brown on the back, with broad dark cinnamon-brown striping on the breast and belly, and have pale yellow eyes.

**Food:** Birds, small mammals, insects and occasionally carrion.

**Habitat:** Uncommon, but can be seen year-round in our forests, especially in southern forested regions.

**Nest:** They prefer to build their stick nests on large tree branches near the trunk, not too close to the canopy, in old-growth coniferous forests located close to open areas for hunting. Will renovate and re-use old nests, or build new ones.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** From mid-April to first week of August.

**Similar species:** Juveniles and male goshawks may appear similar to juvenile female Cooper's hawks. In most cases, goshawks have a larger body and appear more broad-winged. They have a pronounced white eyebrow.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*A sharp-shinned hawk will surprise its prey on the wing by bursting out from a hidden perch with a rush of speed.*

Order: Accipitriformes  
 Family: Accipitridae

## Sharp-shinned Hawk

*Accipiter striatus*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 87-218 grams

**Body length:** 24-34 cm

**Wing Span:** 43-56 cm



**Traits:** Small hawk with short rounded wings, long squared tail and thin legs. Adults have horizontal red-orange bars on their chest with slate blue-gray back and head. Juveniles have brown backs and white chest with vertical brown streaks.

**Food:** Songbirds, shorebirds and small rodents.

**Habitat:** Uncommon migrant and breeder in mature dense forests in the southern NWT, the Mackenzie Mountains and down the Mackenzie Valley to the Delta.

**Nest:** Untidy stick nest in a tree. Sharp-shinned hawks will rarely renovate and re-use a nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Second week of June to mid-August.

**Similar species:** Similar to Cooper's hawk, which has a square head and dark cap, whereas the sharp-shinned hawk has a round head and no cap.



**DID YOU KNOW!**

*The northern harrier's owl-like face helps it hear and find prey.*

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Northern Harrier

*Circus hudsonius*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 300-750 grams

**Body length:** 46-50 cm

**Wing Span:** 102-118 cm

**Traits:** Medium-sized hawk with long rounded tail and broad wings. Look for a patch of white on the upper portion of the tail near the body. This hawk has an owl-like facial disk. Wings are held in a V-shape when flying. They will hover over an area to look for prey, then move on, flapping their wings at quick intervals. Females are warm brown above, whitish below with heavy brown streaking on breast and flanks; light spotting and streaking on belly. Males are grey above with white below; black wing tips. Juveniles resemble adults but are cinnamon below, fading to cream.

**Food:** Rodents, frogs, birds, insects and young waterfowl.

**Habitat:** Common migrant and breeder in mainland NWT. Observed in open wetlands, dry open habitats and tundra.

**Nest:** Built on a slightly raised platform using plant material, on the ground in patches of tall vegetation providing cover. Not known to reuse the same nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Last week of May to second week of August.

**Similar species:** Juvenile harriers appear similar to juvenile northern goshawks, but the latter lack the white rump patch.





## DID YOU KNOW!

*Red-tailed hawks have excellent vision and can see colours like humans, as well as colours in the ultraviolet range.*



Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Red-tailed Hawk

*Buteo jamaicensis*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 690-1,460 grams

**Body length:** 45-65 cm

**Wing Span:** 114-133 cm



**Traits:** This hawk vary in plumage. The sub-species western red-tail hawks (*calurus*), eastern red-tail hawks (*borealis*), and northern red-tailed hawks (*abiericola*) breed in the NWT. Untangling subspecies and colour morphs can be very difficult. Most adults will have some red in their tails. All have a broad body, rounded wing tips and a heavy bill. Look for a colour demarcation forming a band between belly and chest. The Harlan's hawk (*harlani*), seen in the NWT occasionally, has strikingly well-defined markings. Juveniles have all grey-brown tails with dark bands, streaking and spotting on breast and belly.

**Food:** Small mammals, rodents, birds, amphibians and carrion.

**Habitat:** Common migrant and breeder in our southern forest regions where they prefer openings and prairie groves. The make-up of sub-species nesting in the NWT is unclear. Harlan's hawks breed in Alaska, Yukon and northern British Columbia, and most likely western NWT.

**Nest:** Stick nests in trees, on cliff ledges and human-made structures. Prefers nest sites with good flight accessibility and openness. Tree nests are near the canopy. Will renovate and re-use nest, or build new ones.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** First week of May to first week of August.

**Similar species:** The red-tailed hawk is similar to the Swainson's hawk; the latter has dark flight feathers giving the wings a two-toned appearance.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Rough-legged hawks like to perch facing into the wind, scanning for prey below. They readily perch on human-made objects, such as fence posts and utility poles. Watch for these hawks on winter road trips, as their feather colours make them clearly visible.*

Order: Accipitriformes  
Family: Accipitridae

## Rough-legged Hawk

*Buteo lagopus*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 715-1,400 grams

**Body length:** 47-52 cm

**Wing Span:** 132-138 cm

**Traits:** This large hawk has long wings, a long white tail with dark bands and a relatively small bill. They can be light or dark morphs. Light morphs seem more common in the NWT than dark morphs. The name “rough-legged” refers to the feathers coming right down over legs to toes. When viewed in flight, look for broad dark patches at the wrists, and on the light morph, look for a colour demarcation or thick necklace between the breast and belly. Males have a multi-banded tail with thin black bands, whereas most adult females have a light tail with a single broad, sharply defined band near the tip. Juveniles usually have a single broad, poorly defined brown tail band.

**Food:** Small mammals, rodents and carrion.

**Habitat:** Breeds in the Arctic, making or reusing stick nests on cliff ledges. Nesting numbers can cycle from low to high following similar fluctuation in prey availability. These hawks can also be seen in any regions of the NWT during migration in open country, fields and marshes.

**Nest:** Large stick nest on cliff ledges, rock outcrops, on steep banks or hillsides. Will renovate and re-use nest sites.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Mid-May to end of August.

**Similar species:** Similar to red-tailed hawks. The rough-legged hawk has a lighter head, thick black belly patch, and dark patches on the underside at the wrists.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Broad-winged hawks travel in large flocks or “kettles” with other raptors when migrating south during the fall.*

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Broad-winged Hawk

*Buteo platypterus*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 265-560 grams

**Body length:** 34-44 cm

**Wing Span:** 81-100 cm

**Traits:** Small hawk with broad wings that are slightly pointed at the tip. Light morph broad-winged hawks have solid brown backs with barred reddish-brown breasts and, to a lesser extent, belly. Dark morphs are solid brown. They have a short tail with obvious black and white tail bands. This hawk has a piercing “ti-seeee” whistle. Juveniles have streaked breasts and belly markings below.

**Food:** Small mammals, shrews, voles, insects and small birds.

**Habitat:** Uncommon in mature forest in wooded areas southern NWT.

**Nest:** Stick nests on tree branches away from the canopy. May use an old nest built by ravens or other hawks.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Unknown for most of the range but suspected first week of June to mid-August. Breeding was confirmed only in the Fort Liard area, so far.

**Similar species:** Red-tailed hawks can be mistaken for broad-winged hawks, but the latter have distinct black and white bars on the tail.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Swainson's hawks can be found near grass fires, catching prey driven into the open by the flames.*

Order: Accipitriformes

Family: Accipitridae

## Swainson's Hawk

*Buteo swainsoni*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 693-1,367 grams

**Body length:** 48-56 cm

**Wing Span:** 117-137 cm



**Traits:** This hawk has long wings with pointed tips and a small hooked bill. Light morph adults have a grey-brown head and reddish chest, with a tail marked with narrow dark bands and a broader dark band at the tip. In flight, light morphs' wings show distinctive white under coverlets and dark primary feathers. Dark morph adults will vary in colour, but most have reddish underwings and a dark breast and belly. Juveniles have streaking on the chest with pale under tail feathers.

**Food:** Rodents, birds, large insects and small mammals.

**Habitat:** A western raptor, this hawk has been observed and should be looked for in the Mackenzie Mountains in the NWT, where they use open prairies and grasslands in valleys. They have also been recorded occasionally in open areas in the Mackenzie Valley. In general, this hawk is very uncommon in the NWT and breeding records are unconfirmed.

**Nest:** Stick nest in a tree near the canopy. They prefer nesting in solitary trees or small groves in open areas. Can renovate and re-use a nest.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Unknown, but possibly late May to mid-August.

**Similar species:** Swainson's hawk can look like a red-tailed hawk, but the former has longer pointed wings and a brown chest, whereas the red-tailed hawk has dark marks on the leading edges of its wings and a belly band of dark streaks.







Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

## American Kestrel

*Falco sparverius*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 80-165 grams

**Body length:** 22-31 cm

**Wing Span:** 51-61 cm



**Traits:** Our smallest falcon and the most colourful, American kestrels sport a thin but well-defined black mustache and black bar, or side-burn, below the ear. Adult females have a wide rust-coloured back, wings with bars, and chests mottled with rusty markings. The adult male's back is rusty with black bars, and its wings have grey-blue wing coverlets. Juveniles have heavily streaked breast feathers and a barred back. The kestrel makes a loud "klee-klee-klee" sound.

**Food:** Small mammals and birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects.

**Habitat:** Common migrant and breeder in our forested regions in open habitats with dead tree snags used for nesting. Prefer to look for prey in fields with short ground vegetation, grasslands, parks and even city parks.

**Nest:** Nests on bare floor, without nesting material, in natural cavities, like snags or cavities built by other birds, such as woodpeckers. Will use openings in human habitations or appropriately-sized nest boxes.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Last week of May to mid-August.

**Similar species:** The merlin is larger and lacks the slate-blue wings and two black slashes on the face.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Merlins were once known as pigeon hawks because they hunt birds and somewhat resemble a pigeon in flight.*

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

## Merlin

*Falco columbarius*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 160-240 grams

**Body length:** 24-30 cm

**Wing Span:** 53-68 cm



**Traits:** This small falcon has variable plumage with a heavily streaked chest and dark underwings, and only two to five light bands on back of tail. Females have dark brown backs; males have blue-grey backs. Some birds sport a mustache stripe and white eyebrows. Juveniles are dark brown with pale tail bands.

**Food:** Small birds and rodents, large insects, amphibians, reptiles and bats.

**Habitat:** Common migrant and breeder in our forests where they use openings, such as wooded prairies, wetlands and lake or river shores. They are also found north of the treeline near the coast and on the mainland. Seen occasionally further north.

**Nest:** Do not build new nests, but always modify and re-use a stick nest built by a corvid (e.g. raven) or other hawks. Prefer to nest in trees, but may use stick nests on a cliff or ground if predator proof.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Likely second week of May to late July.

**Similar species:** Peregrine falcons are larger and their mustache stripe is thicker and more defined. Merlins are similar to kestrels but are heavier and have a larger head.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*The status of Peregrine Falcon was re-assessed in 2017 and determined to not be at risk. The species has recovered from very low population numbers in the 1960s and 1970s due to the effects of insecticide accumulation, which caused egg shell thinning and nesting failure.*

Order: Falconiformes  
Family: Falconidae

## Peregrine Falcon

*Falco peregrinus*



**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 530-1,600 grams

**Body length:** 36-49 cm

**Wing Span:** 100-110 cm

**Traits:** This large falcon has a distinctive blue-grey back, nape and wings. They sport a well-defined black crown and heavy mustache. Their chest is white and belly is barred. The juvenile's coloration is variable and generally heavily streaked. Juveniles are mostly brown, unlike the slate grey and white of adults. Juveniles are streaked on breast and belly, unlike the barring found on adults.

**Food:** Birds and small mammals.

**Habitat:** Migrant and local breeder in open country or tundra, mudflats and large wetlands near cliffs.

**Nest:** Does not construct a nest. Nesting location on high cliff ledges will consist of bare ground or un-renovated old stick nests, almost never on trees. Will nest on ground of steep embankments and will also be found nesting on human structures or human-made rock walls, such as mine pits and quarries.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Second week of May to end of August.

**Similar species:** Comparable to the merlin and gyrfalcon, but peregrine falcons have a more defined mustache.



### DID YOU KNOW!

*Gyrfalcon is the official bird of the NWT. A gyrfalcon will fly low to sneak up on its victim.*

Order: Falconiformes

Family: Falconidae

## Gyr Falcon

*Falco rusticolus*

**Body Size:** (males-females range)

**Weight:** 800-2,100 grams

**Body length:** 48-64 cm

**Wing Span:** 123 cm



**Traits:** Large heavily-built falcon with long pointed wings and long tail. Colour ranges from white, silver-grey to dark brown with heavy horizontal bars on back, wings and tails. Adults can have a mustache and black eyebrow. Eye ring, cere (base of upper beak) and legs are yellow-orange. Juveniles have a heavily streaked body and light flight feathers.

**Food:** Birds including ptarmigan and waterfowl, and small mammals including Arctic hare and Arctic ground squirrels.

**Habitat:** Present year-round but uncommonly observed. They nest on cliff ledges in tundra habitats. In winter they move further south, using open or shrubby areas in forest openings or grasslands to look for prey.

**Nest:** Does not construct a nest. Nesting usually on high cliff ledges will consist of bare ground. They can take over a stick nest built by another raptor or raven on a cliff ledge, tree or human-made structure.

**Breeding Period in the NWT:** Second week of April to first week of August.

**Similar species:** Grey or darker gyrfalcons may look similar to Peregrine falcons but the former has head marked with pale feathers, and a less defined mustache. The nape (back of neck) of Peregrine falcons is a solid colour without pale streaks. White gyrfalcons have no similar species.



## For More Information

### **Government of the Northwest Territories**

Environment and Natural Resources  
Wildlife Division  
[www.enr.gov.nt.ca](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca)  
E-mail: [wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca](mailto:wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca)

### **Species at Risk**

Government of the Northwest Territories  
Environment and Natural Resources  
Species at Risk  
[www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca](http://www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca)  
Phone: (855) 783-4301  
E-mail: [sara@gov.nt.ca](mailto:sara@gov.nt.ca)

### **NWT Raptor Resources:**

[www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/birds-prey](http://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/en/services/birds-prey)  
[www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca](http://www.nwt-speciesatrisk.ca)  
[www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)  
<https://birdsna.org>

### **Helpful Resources:**

[ebird.org](http://ebird.org)  
[iNaturalist.ca](http://iNaturalist.ca)  
[ornithologi.com/2016/02/24/the-new-raptor-id-app/](http://ornithologi.com/2016/02/24/the-new-raptor-id-app/)  
[www.gbif.org](http://www.gbif.org)

Britton, D, Cameron, E., Tate, D, Pankratz, R. and Carriere, S. 2019. Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Northwest Territories. Draft report available at [wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca](mailto:wildlifeobs@gov.nt.ca)

### **Breeding Periods information can be found here:**

Shank, C.C. and Poole, K.G. 2016. Critical Breeding Periods for Raptor Species of the Northwest Territories. File Report 147. Government of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife. NT.  
[https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/raptor\\_species\\_breeding\\_periods.pdf](https://www.enr.gov.nt.ca/sites/enr/files/raptor_species_breeding_periods.pdf)

Body sizes are from [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)

### **Print on demand**

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