

SNOWY OWL

Harfang des neiges

Nyctea scandiaca



Breeding Range of Snowy Owl in Ontario



ALTERNATE NAMES

Arctic Owl; Ermine Owl; Great White Owl; Harfang; Wapachthu; White Owl.

IDENTIFICATION

Very large, mostly white owl. Barred and spotted brown; amount of marking dependent on age and sex of bird. Adult males are much smaller and paler than females, and immatures are generally the most heavily streaked. Head large and round with golden eyes. Legs and feet almost completely covered by thick feather layer.

VOCALIZATION

Call consists of a rough raven-like croak, a shrill whistle, or a loud barking growl. Its territorial song is hooted from the ground.

BEHAVIOUR

Preferred food source is lemmings; this nomadic species will move according to availability of food. Also eats birds (from songbirds to medium sized geese), other

small mammals (from small rodents to large hares), and fish and other small aquatic animals. Hunts diurnally, at times consuming over 1600 lemmings a year. Sedentary when not in flight; flight has a jerky, swaying pattern that is a good field characteristic, even at a distance. However, when in pursuit of prey, flight is strong, smooth, and falcon-like.

HABITAT

Prefers open tundra for breeding. Frequents areas with standing shrubs for perching.

NESTING HABITS

Defends territory by being very vocal and aggressive in response to intruders. Has been known to attack humans and even wolves in order to protect its young. The female constructs nests on turf or bare ground. She creates a shallow depression, lacking any lining material, in which to lay her eggs. Clutch sizes of up to 12 have been documented in years when food availability is high; in years when food is scarce, this species has been known to delay breeding until the next year.