

Rough-legged Hawk

Buse pattue
Buteo lagopus

Nordic Species
(rare visitor to southern
Québec)

Wingspan: 122 cm to 142 cm



The Rough-legged Hawk is the most widespread species of hawk in Nordic Quebec. The name « rough-legged » refers to the fact that its feet are feathered right to the base of the toes in order to keep the feet warm in the coldest part of winter. The other species of hawk do not have feathered feet. The Rough-legged Hawk has a dark body and a light coloured tail with black bands. There are two patterns of colouration seen with rough-legged hawks: dark and light (paler).



The female's tail displays one or several black bands, while the male's tail is barred with fine black stripes.



The Rough-legged Hawk lives in the tundra in northern Quebec, but we can also observe her flying above our fields in the wintertime when she migrates into southern regions in search of warmer temperatures.



She feeds primarily on rodents, like voles and lemmings, but also on birds, amphibians and even fish.



The Rough-legged Hawk can live up to 18 years in nature and up to 32 years in captivity.



The Rough-legged Hawk nests in the tundra on a cliff edge, a pile of rocks or sometimes in a large tree. The female often re-uses the same nest year after year. She generally lays 3 to 6 eggs. Sometimes clutches of 7 eggs are observed, but only when prey are abundant.



The male chicks are the first to make their flight attempts towards the age of 34 to 36 days. The females, being larger, will take flight later, around 40 to 45 days old. The young are still fed by their parents 20 to 25 days after their first flight.



The Rough-legged Hawk population has appeared stable up until now and it is situated far from human influence. However, the situation has deteriorated over the last few years due to mining and drilling operations in Nordic regions.



Rough-legged hawks are monogamous; meaning the male and female remain mated during several seasons, thus for several years. In these cases, the male and female undergo their migrations together as a couple.