

# Northern Hawk Owl

Chouette épervière  
*Surnia ulula*

Nordic Species  
(rare visitor to southern  
Québec)

Wingspan: 84 cm



The Northern Hawk Owl carries her name well as she strangely resembles a hawk. She has a long tail, upon which she balances as a falcon would, and her wings are pointed. Her facial discs are reduced in comparison to other owls. Her pale plumage hosts strong brown bands on the chest and spots on the back. Even her flight is distinctive; it consists of several rapid wingbeats followed by a short gliding flight. The Northern Hawk Owl is the only owl capable of hovering (flying while remaining in one place).



The male and female are similar.



The Northern Hawk Owl generally lives in the northern part of Quebec. When she migrates to southern Quebec in the wintertime, she frequents conifer and mixed forests close to open spaces, such as a field, peat bog or lake.



She feeds mostly on small rodents and sometimes on birds and insects. It also happens that she'll complete a meal with frogs or fish. This little owl is mostly diurnal.



The Northern Hawk Owl has a lifespan of about 10 years.



This hawk is one of the rare Strigiformes to build its own nest, but it can also use holes in trees, such as a northern flicker's old nest or an abandoned crow's nest. The female lays 5 to 7 eggs.



The young make their first flight attempt around 4 to 5 weeks of age. They remain dependant upon their parents until they are 3 months old.



The species is relatively common, but the population's size is unknown. Given that this species lives in regions far from urban centers, it is rarely seen. The population distribution varies in relationship to prey availability; when prey is lacking in Nordic regions, the birds descend upon southern Quebec and can be observed by the educated birdwatcher.



The young develop very quickly and have an excellent survival rate; at just 3 to 4 weeks of age they have already grown to 78% the body weight of an adult. The parents have an effective method of ensuring this rapid development in their offspring: they hide food all over their territory in order to ensure continuous food availability to the ravenous young chicks. This caching technique also provides a backup source of food during prey shortages. Overall, this food storing habit allows the Northern Hawk Owl to survive well despite the unpredictable nature of its Nordic environments.