



**THE GREAT HORNED OWL**, *Bubo virginianus*, is the most common and widespread owl in Alaska, found all across the state except for the North Slope. To two feet (or more) and wingspan to fifty inches, this familiar raptor is easily

recognized by its large size, mottled brown or grayish brown color (with finely barred, lighter chest and belly) and long ear tufts. With the keenest sight and hearing, the great horned owl hunts during the night for rabbits, squirrels and small rodents in Alaska.



**THE STARK, WHITE SNOWY OWL**, *Bubo scandiacus*, is a bird of the arctic tundras that breeds across northern and westernmost Alaska and sometimes migrates south in winter, often as far as the northern states. A large owl at 20-24 inches and wingspan of 4 feet, the yellow-eyed snowy is all white with sparse brown bars and spots and no ear tufts. (Mature males are almost pure white.) It hunts

ptarmigan, and nests on the ground. It is seen sometimes in southern and central Alaska during winters when food is scarce up north.



Secretive and uncommon, **THE GREAT GRAY OWL**, *Strix nebulosa*, is Alaska's largest, with body length in excess of two feet and wingspan to five feet. Found in dense forests from Southeast to the Brooks Range, this grayish brown, mostly nocturnal hunter has a large, tuftless head and broad, round face ringed with many concentric gray circles. A rodent hunter that utilizes abandoned nests of other large birds, the great gray is seldom seen, except at dusk

or dawn, perched in trees on the edge of forests or in swamps. The call is usually a deep, booming "hoo-hoo-hoo".



**THE HAWK OWL**, *Surnia ulula*, is one of Alaska's more common small owls, found across most of the state. Very hawklike in appearance (except for its face) and flight, it is 15-18 inches long with pointed wings to 30 inches, and has a deep brown back, heavily barred, whitish underparts, and a light colored facial disc, outlined in black. This tame owl lives primarily on rodents and small birds, hunting mostly during the day. It is frequently seen perched on tree tops or

utility poles or flying swift and low above the ground. The call varies, usually a rapid trill of notes or a sharp screech



**THE BOREAL OWL**, *Aegolius funereus*, is another fairly common small owl found in the state's coniferous forests, from Southeast to western Alaska. A handsome, little (ten inches long and twenty inch wingspan) spotted brown owl with big yellow eyes set in a broad, dark bordered, off-white face with no ear tufts, the boreal is a nocturnal hunter that lives on rodents and small birds and nests in the hollows of trees. Listen for its distinctive call (similar to

snipe, a rapid trill of notes) and look for one perched near the trunk of a tree in late evening and early morning in fields and forest borders.



**THE SHORT EARED OWL**, *Asio flammeus*, is a widespread but uncommon, medium-sized (13-17 inches; wingspan to 40 inches) owl found in open country across Alaska. It is mottled brown (with tawny, streaked chest) and heavily barred in wings and tail. As the name suggests, the ear tufts are barely visible. The short eared owl hunts rodents and other small animals, flying low over the ground

like a marsh hawk. (It also makes its nest on the ground.) This is the only Alaska owl that regularly migrates south for the winter. The call is a screechy bark or hoot.

#### RANGE AND VIEWING

**BEST VIEWING:** Look (and listen) for Alaska's owls in forests and open country. They are especially active in spring and summer and most often seen around dusk and dawn.

**BEST LOCATIONS:** Denali National Park (INT); Denali, Dalton and Glenn (mile 117) Hwy; Palmer Hayflats (SC)



Great Horned and Great Gray Owls



White Snowy Owl



Hawk Owl



Boreal Owl



Short Eared Owl



## Osprey

**A RARE TO LOCALLY COMMON** bird of prey along fish filled rivers, lakes and coastlines, from the southeast panhandle to northwest Alaska, the osprey, *Pandion Haliaeetus*, or fish hawk as it is commonly known, shares habitat with and is often mistaken for the bald eagle, which can appear similar in flight from a distance.

Distributed worldwide, the osprey has special adaptations for a life of snatching fish from the water. A large bird (to 24 inches and six foot wingspan) capable of carrying off prey of substantial size, it is equipped with sharp, curved talons and beak and opposable toes that allow for gripping flesh from the front or back. The wings, back and face are dark brown, the belly, chest, throat and head are white. The osprey can be recognized from the bald eagle by its more narrow and crooked wings in flight, barred cheeks and lighter undersides. The unique call, a loud chirp, aids in identification.

With keen eyes capable of scanning from high above, the osprey locates small fish near the surface and dives feet first into the water to grab its prey. Like the eagle, it builds a large stick nest in a tree close to the water (usually a big cottonwood or spruce in Alaska), where 2-4 young are born in spring. By late summer they are ready to join their parents in flight, as they prepare for their fall migration south to spend winters in Mexico and South America. Ospreys can live to over 20 years in the wild.

### RANGE AND VIEWING

**BEST VIEWING:** Look for Alaska's ospreys along clearer, productive streams, lakes and coastline, in the same habitat favored by the bald eagle.

**BEST LOCATIONS:** Bristol Bay (SW), lower Kuskokwim & Yukon rivers (SW); Katmai National Park (SW), Upper Tanana Valley (INT-GMU 12); Kenai NWR (SC); Matanuska-Susitna valley (SC); Tetlin NWR (INT)




**AN ABUNDANT** and widespread alpine grouse that thrives in the North's vast treeless areas, the ptarmigan trades its drab summer coat in fall for one of purest white. Three very similar species occur throughout Alaska: the willow ptarmigan (*Lagopus lagopus*), rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus mutus*) and white-tailed ptarmigan (*Lagopus leucurus*).

They are small to medium sized upland birds, 10 to 14 inches long and  $\frac{2}{3}$  to 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  pounds, with grayish to reddish, mottled brown summer plumage (except for the wings) and all white winter dress except for the tail which remains black on rock and willow ptarmigan. (Males also have bright eye combs in spring.)

These birds live at or above timberline in the state's mountain country and tundras of the western and arctic regions. They spend most of their lives on the ground, foraging on a variety of vegetation, insects and berries during the warm months and buds, catkins and twigs of birch, willow and alder during the long winter. All three species nest in shallow depressions on the ground and have from 4-10 young in the spring.

Ptarmigan are very social and found in flocks most of the year (sometimes in great numbers). They are known for their frequent and distinctive vocalizations -various croaking, clucking and grunting sounds- and habit of running along the ground to flee predators (the fox, golden eagle, gyrfalcon, snowy owl and man).

### RANGE AND VIEWING

**BEST VIEWING:** Look (and listen) for Alaska's ptarmigan on rocky slopes and in brushy valleys near or above treeline, in all of the state's major mountain areas. They are most active in spring and fall.

**BEST LOCATIONS:** Denali and Dalton Hwys; Denali National Park (INT); Lake Clark National Park (SW); Wrangell St. Elias National Park (SC); ANWR (ARC); Steese Highway, Mile 85-108 (INT).

