

# **COMMON RAPTORS AND OTHER LARGE BIRDS OF NEW MEXICO**

**New Mexico Avian Protection Working Group**



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## COMMON RAPTORS AND OTHER LARGE BIRDS OF NEW MEXICO

Text prepared by  
Gail Garber and Sarah Young, Hawks Aloft, Inc.

This document includes information on common species of raptors, most likely to interact with power lines in such a way as to cause electrocution. It is not a representation of all raptor species in New Mexico.

### Contents

Soaring Hawks (Buteos).....	2
Ferruginous Hawk ( <i>Buteo regalis</i> ) .....	2
Red-tailed Hawk ( <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i> ) .....	3
Swainson's Hawk ( <i>Buteo swainsoni</i> ) .....	4
Harris' Hawk ( <i>Parabuteo unicinctus</i> ).....	5
Forest Hawks (Accipiters) .....	6
Cooper's Hawk ( <i>Accipiter cooperii</i> ).....	6
Northern Goshawk ( <i>Accipiter gentilis</i> ).....	7
Falcons.....	8
American Kestrel ( <i>Falco sparverius</i> ).....	8
Prairie Falcon ( <i>Falco mexicanus</i> ) .....	9
Peregrine Falcon ( <i>Falco peregrinus</i> ) .....	10
Eagles .....	11
Bald Eagle ( <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i> ) .....	11
Golden Eagle ( <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i> ) .....	12
Osprey - The Fish Hawk.....	13
Osprey ( <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> ) .....	13
Northern Harrier .....	14
Northern Harrier ( <i>Circus cyaneus</i> ).....	14
Big Black Birds .....	15
Turkey Vulture ( <i>Cathartes aura</i> ) .....	15
Common Raven ( <i>Corvus corax</i> ) .....	16
Chihuahuan Raven ( <i>Corvus cryptoleucus</i> ) .....	17
American Crow ( <i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i> ) .....	18
Owls .....	19
Barn Owl ( <i>Tyto alba</i> ).....	19
Great Horned Owl ( <i>Bubo virginianus</i> ).....	20
Western Screech-Owl ( <i>Otus kennicottii</i> ) .....	21
Literature Cited.....	22

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## Soaring Hawks (Buteos)

### Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*)



This is the largest and most powerful hawk in North America. Ferruginous Hawks are so named because of the ferrous or iron-colored patches on their shoulders. This species is highly variable and plumage varies from nearly pure white to black. It occurs in the grasslands of western North America, often in association with prairie dog colonies, a preferred prey item. It routinely utilizes power poles for hunting perches and uses transformer poles as nesting substrate.

#### Identification:

- length: 20-26 inches; wingspan: 56 inches
- largest of the soaring hawks
- white belly and under wing, with small rufous specks
- rufous back, white head and tail
- wide mouth gape
- feathered legs - dark in adults, white in juveniles
- adults have a rufous "V" formed by legs in flight
- soars and circles with slightly up-tilted wings
- similar species: Red-tailed Hawk



**Habitat:** This hawk is an open country species.

It inhabits large flat expanses of juniper savanna and grassland. It does not utilize forested areas or narrow canyons, but is found on the borders between piñon-juniper forests and open grassland.

**Nesting:** Nests are usually on a lone juniper or deciduous tree, rock spire, or man-made structure such as a power pole. Nests from previous years are often re-used. Egg laying begins in March. The average clutch size is 2-4 eggs. The young leave the nest after 38-50 days. Highly susceptible to human disturbance and may abandon nests if disturbed at any time during the breeding process.

**Diet:** Primarily feeds on rabbits, squirrels, and prairie dogs. They employ the 'sit-and-wait' technique when hunting, and often sit and wait at prairie dog colonies.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** (Breeding season) Plains of San Agustin, Estancia Valley, northeastern plains, badlands of San Juan County. (Winter) Found in grasslands throughout the state.

## Red-tailed Hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*)



The Red-tailed Hawk is large, widespread and common. It is found almost everywhere in North America and is associated with a wide variety of habitats, although it nests in more forested areas than either the Swainson's or Ferruginous Hawk. Some individuals of this species are tolerant of human disturbance and can be found nesting on the outskirts of cities and in active, open pit mines. They utilize power poles for hunting perches, and will also use transformer poles for nesting substrate.

### Identification:

- length: 17-22 inches; wingspan: 49 inches
- rufous tail with a dark band near the tip (adults)
- banded tail and dark belly band (juveniles)
- cream-colored chest with a highly variable dark belly band
- buff-colored V on back of perched adults
- dark leading edge of the wing near the shoulder
- many variations in color from very light to almost black
- juveniles have a banded tail
- similar species: Ferruginous Hawk, Swainson's Hawk

**Habitat:** They prefer open areas with scattered elevated perches in a wide range of habitats including desert scrub, plains, montane grasslands, agricultural fields, urban parks, and broken coniferous and deciduous forest. They are edge specialists, and concentrate in the transitional areas between habitat types. They use elevated perch sites and are frequently seen using power poles as hunting perches.



**Nesting:** They build nests in early March to April and lay two eggs. Eggs are incubated by both parents for 28-35 days. Young begin to leave the nest after approximately 46 days, and are dependent on parents until 10 weeks after fledging.

**Diet:** Generalists, feeding on a wide variety of animals including voles, mice, rats, cottontails, ground squirrels, birds, and small reptiles, including snakes. Fresh carrion is taken when available. They prefer to hunt from high perches on the edge of open ground.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** Found statewide during all seasons.

## Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)



The Swainson's Hawk is a large hawk of prairies and open country in western North America. Slim and buoyant, this species has the longest migration of any hawk, traveling to the plains of Argentina for the winter season. During migration they travel in large flocks called 'kettles' containing hundreds to thousands of hawks, utilizing thermal updrafts. They utilize power poles for hunting perches and nesting substrates, constructing nests on crossbars as well as transformers. The Swainson's Hawk is the only North American Hawk that has dark flight feathers.

### Identification:

- length: 19-22 inches; wingspan: 50 inches
- cream-colored breast with dark head and chest bib (adults)
- uniformly brownish-gray back with lighter feather tips
- two-tone underwing, dark flight feathers, pale leading edge
- long, pointed wings and banded tail
- many variations in color from very light to almost black
- similar species: Red-tailed Hawk, Prairie Falcon



**Habitat:** Typically found in open grasslands, rangelands, open woodlands, sparse shrublands, and agricultural areas. However, this bird cannot forage in perennial agricultural crops that are much taller than native grasses. During migration, this species often follows farm equipment, preying on small mammals and insects that are disturbed.

**Nesting:** They usually nest in solitary trees surrounded by open grassland or shrubland. Males select the nest site, and both sexes build the nest in about one week. Egg laying begins in April. Eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days, and nestlings fledge about 43 days later.

**Diet:** During the breeding season, Swainson's Hawks are generalists, preying on ground squirrels, pocket gophers, voles, deer mice, and rabbits. In New Mexico and Arizona, lizards and snakes are common prey items. In late summer, and throughout fall and winter, Swainson's Hawks are insectivorous, feeding almost exclusively on crickets, beetles, grasshoppers, and locusts. In Argentina, Swainson's Hawks are known as the Locust Hawk.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico during the breeding season and migration only.

**Concentration locations:** Grasslands of eastern and southern New Mexico, although some individuals utilize grasslands in other parts of the state.

## Harris' Hawk (*Parabuteo unicinctus*)



These long-legged birds are known for their highly social nature. This makes them susceptible to electrocutions on power poles. They roost communally, with the entire family group sometimes perching on the same structure. They utilize power poles for hunting perches and nesting substrates, constructing nests on crossbars as well as transformers. Pairs will re-build nests on the same structure as in previous years, even if the previous nest was destroyed. In areas where Harris' Hawks occur near urban development, research has shown electrocution to be the number one cause of mortality.

### Identification:

- length: 18-23 inches; wingspan: 43 inches
- chestnut leg feathers and wing coverts
- paddle-shaped, all-dark underwing
- broad white patch at the base and tip of the tail
- juveniles have streaked whitish underparts
- juveniles have banded flight and tail feathers
- similar species: none

**Habitat:** Prefers semi-open desert scrub, savanna, and grassland with dispersed hunting perches such as small trees (mesquite) and power poles. In New Mexico, this species inhabits mesquite-oak shrubland with rolling sandy soils.

**Nesting:** Both adults build the nest, which is usually located in tall, sturdy structures such as transmission towers, windmill platforms and artificial nesting platforms. They nest in social units, consisting of adults and immature birds, with as many as seven individuals assisting the nesting pair. There are two peaks of nest-building in New Mexico: March-April and August-September. Egg-laying (usually 3-4) begins in March, although this species will breed year-round if adequate prey and suitable habitat conditions exist. Eggs are incubated for approximately 34 days, and nestlings fledge about 45 days later.

**Diet:** Uses 'sit-and-wait' foraging and short-flight-perch hunting to capture medium-sized to large mammals (often hares and rabbits), birds, and lizards. Family groups forage cooperatively and employ one of the most sophisticated hunting strategies known in birds.

**Seasonality:** Found in southern New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** (Breeding) Largely restricted to the Los Medanos region in the extreme southeastern part of the state, east of the Guadalupe Mountains. (Winter) Individuals can be seen throughout southern New Mexico.

## Forest Hawks (Accipiters)

### Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*)



The Cooper's Hawk is a crow-sized woodland raptor. It is widely distributed throughout much of the United States, although is usually secretive and inconspicuous, particularly during the breeding season. Females are about one third larger than males. Often known as "blue darters," this hawk is a fast and deadly hunter, superbly adapted for quick pursuit of forest birds and mammals. Their habit of flying fast and low to the ground and then shooting straight up to the top of a utility pole to perch puts them at risk for electrocution.



#### Identification:

- length: 15-18 inches; wingspan: 31 inches
- adults have gray back with rufous and white horizontally-barred breast
- juveniles have brown back with white, vertically-streaked breast
- short-rounded wings and long tail
- large, square head and stout legs
- orange to red colored eyes in adults
- similar species: Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk

**Habitat:** Tolerant of human disturbance, Cooper's Hawks can be found virtually anywhere with small prey birds. They prefer trees or brushy areas from which to launch their lightning-fast attacks. They also frequent backyard bird feeders and are very common in low and mid-elevation riparian woodlands.

**Nesting:** Nests in deciduous, riparian forests, usually in cottonwood or other deciduous trees in New Mexico, often building new nests in areas used in previous years. Egg laying begins in April. Eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days, and nestlings fledge about 31 days later.

**Diet:** Captures a variety of prey, mainly medium-sized birds and mammals such as jays, robins, chipmunks, and other rodents. Relies on concealment when hunting.

**Seasonality:** Year-round, although some migrate south for winter.

**Concentration Locations:** Forested riparian and montane forests, cities.

## Northern Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*)



The Northern Goshawk is a large, forest raptor and an aggressive, powerful hunter. This bird is not often seen outside of big timber areas except during migration. It chases its prey (squirrels, hares and birds) at breakneck speeds through the trees. Highly maneuverable, it is one of the most prized birds for falconry. Known as the “cook’s hawk” for its courage and aggression when hunting game. Due to its preference for coniferous forest, this species is not at high risk of interaction with power lines, although electrocution has been known to occur.

### Identification:

- length: 17-24 inches; wingspan: 41 inches
- finely-barred, gray underparts with banded gray tail
- dark head with white line above eye in adults
- two-tone upperwings: blue-gray and white
- long, broad wings, tapered when soaring/gliding
- long, rounded tail with wedge-shaped tip
- orange to blood-red eyes in adults
- similar species: Cooper’s Hawk



**Habitat:** Higher elevation montane and coniferous forest, often occurring in ponderosa pine, fir, and aspen. They prefer mature forests with large trees on moderate slopes with open understories.

**Nesting:** Nests are built by the female, typically in the largest trees in the stand. Egg laying begins in May. Eggs are incubated for approximately 30 days, and nestlings fledge about 40 days later.

**Diet:** Opportunistic. Aggressively pursues prey in forested areas (often over long distances), but also ambushes prey in open habitats. Main foods include ground and tree squirrels, rabbits and hares, large passerines, woodpeckers, game birds, and corvids; occasionally reptiles and insects.

**Seasonality:** Year-round with some juveniles migrating south in winter.

**Concentration Locations:** None known.



## Falcons

### American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*)



The smallest of the North American falcons, this raptor is widespread and common over most of North America, at an estimated 1.2 million pairs. It migrates through New Mexico in large numbers in the fall while some (mostly adult) birds stay year-round. They are cavity nesters, and are at risk from electrocutions from open compartments in outdoor lighting and other such applications. American Kestrels are also commonly called sparrow hawks. They have two recognizably different plumages: adult male (left on photo, and also shown below) and adult female (right on photo)

#### Identification:

- length: 8 -10 inches; wingspan: 22 inches
- white cheeks with two bold black mustache marks
- rusty-red base coloration on back feathers
- males have bluish gray patches on the wings, solid rusty tail, and black chest spots
- females have black banding on wings and tail, and vertical brown chest streaks
- pale underwing with row of white dots on trailing edge (in males)
- similar species: Merlin



**Habitat:** Wide variety of habitats, containing open or semi-open areas. They seek trees or man-made structures large enough to contain suitable nesting cavities. They nest in meadows, grasslands, deserts, parkland, agricultural fields and urban or suburban areas, regardless of dominant vegetation. The availability of a nest cavity is the most important factor in habitat selection.

**Nesting:** The coloration of the male seems to be a factor in mate selection. Kestrels nest in tree cavities with openings approximately 3 inches in diameter. Egg-laying begins in May. The clutch size is typically 4-5 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 30 days, and nestlings fledge about 30 days later.

**Diet:** Kestrels primarily feed on insects, small rodents and small birds. They also occasionally feed on reptiles and fish. In urban settings, they hunt in areas with bird feeders. Small prey is eaten on the ground, while larger prey is taken to a tree or perch.

**Seasonality:** Year-round.

**Concentration Locations:** Kestrels occur statewide with no definitive localities.

## Prairie Falcon (*Falco mexicanus*)



The Prairie Falcon is a large, pale brown bird that inhabits arid environments of western North America. In the winter, Prairie Falcons are a fairly common sight along roadsides, in grassland areas where they hunt from utility poles and rock outcroppings. They are seen more frequently at higher elevations in the summer where they nest on cliff faces.



### Identification:

- length: 14-18 inches; wingspan: 40 inches
- light brown back with white spotted front
- square head with white marks behind the eye and narrow mustache
- yellow cere (upper beak), eye ring, and legs
- similar species: Peregrine Falcon, Swainson's Hawk

**Habitat:** Found in open habitat at all elevations up to 3,350 meters. Prefers open grassland habitat, desert scrub, rangeland and agricultural areas.

**Nesting:** Nests are located primarily in cavities, ledges, and on cliffs, but also in trees, and power structures. Frequently lays eggs in nests built by other species (particularly Common Ravens and Golden Eagles). Egg laying begins in April. The clutch size is typically 5 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 34 days, and nestlings fledge about 38 days later.

**Diet:** Feeds primarily on ground squirrels and Horned Larks; but also lizards, other passerine species and small rodents. It takes most prey on or near the ground and usually surprises prey with a stoop or glide attack. Utilizes power poles as hunting perches.

**Seasonality:** Year-round resident with elevational migration within the state. Found at lower elevations during the winter months.

**Concentration Locations:** None known.

## Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*)



The Peregrine is a large, long-winged falcon. Although widespread throughout North America, it is uncommon (although populations have significantly increased since DDT poisoning in the 1970's). Considered the ultimate falconry bird, this falcon is known for hunting from dizzying heights at extreme speeds. This behavior, however, puts this bird at great risk from collision with suspended cables and lines. The word Peregrine means "wanderer," and peregrines nesting in northern latitudes are difficult to monitor due to their nomadic habits, and may travel as much as 16,000 miles annually.

### Identification:

- length: 14-18 inches; wingspan: 41 inches
- bluish-gray back and creamy white belly feathers with dark, horizontal banding
- bluish-gray coloration over face and under eyes creating a hooded appearance
- pointed wing tips when seen in soaring flight
- uniformly dark underwings
- pale to bright yellow cere, feet, and eye outline (adults)
- similar species: Prairie Falcon



**Habitat:** During the summer, Peregrine Falcons are found at higher elevations where they nest on cliffs. They are often seen in proximity to bodies of water where they hunt waterfowl and shorebirds. The Peregrine Falcon thrives in areas with high prey concentrations and suitable nesting sites. Peregrine Falcons have been reintroduced into large cities where their primary prey item is the Rock Pigeon.

**Nesting:** Prefers to nest on cliff faces or flat mesa tops, although nest sites, or 'eyries', may also be located on large buildings or urban bridges. Peregrines use artificial nesting platforms and flat-roofed buildings in areas with high prey availability and frequently re-use same nest locations. Clutch size ranges from 3-6 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days, and nestlings fledge about 40 days later.

**Diet:** They feed primarily on other birds, taking a variety of sizes from songbirds to small geese, depending on the size of the hunting Peregrine. They also prey on medium-sized mammals including bats, and sometimes steal mammals or fish from other raptors. Peregrines hunt in a variety of ways, but the most well known method is the high speed "stoop" during which the falcon can reach speeds of 200 mph.

**Seasonality:** A summer nesting resident to New Mexico; some migrate south in the winter.

**Concentration Locations:** None known.

# Eagles

## Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)



Our national bird is the second largest North American bird of prey. It is widely known in its adult plumage, for its dark brown body, and striking white head and tail. Bald Eagles are usually associated with rivers, lakes, or reservoirs where the birds find their favored prey: fish and waterfowl. They hunt opportunistically for mammals and reptiles, scavenge for road-kill, and even steal prey from other animals.



### Identification:

- length: 27-35 inches; wingspan: 80 inches
- adults uniformly brown with a white head and tail
- adults have brilliant yellow bill
- juveniles are primarily dark with dark bill
- similar species: Golden Eagle

**Habitat:** Generally associated with forested areas adjacent to large bodies of water. However, during migration and winter, Bald Eagles occur throughout New Mexico, and are often observed far from a water source. Uses large, often dead trees, near lakes or rivers, as roosting sites

**Nesting:** Nests are usually built in the largest available tree. Both sexes contribute to nest building, often re-using nests. Egg-laying varies depending on latitude, but usually begins Jan-Feb in southern United States. Clutch size ranges from 1-3 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 35 days, and nestlings fledge about 75 days later.

**Diet:** An opportunistic forager, the Bald Eagle hunts from perches or while soaring over suitable habitat. Attempts to take most prey on the wing. Favors fish, but also consumes birds (particularly waterfowl), mammals, and carrion.

**Seasonality:** In New Mexico, peak numbers of Bald Eagles occur during the winter months. Only a few pairs of Bald Eagles nest in New Mexico, mostly associated with reservoirs in the northern third of the state.

**Concentration locations:** During the winter, large concentrations of this species occur along the Rio Chama between Abiquiu and El Vado Reservoirs. Surveys conducted over an 8-year period document between 40 to 80 adults in this preferred reach of river. Bald Eagles also occur in high wintering concentrations at National Wildlife Refuges or in other locations that have open water.

## Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)



One of North America's largest predatory birds. Golden Eagles occur in hilly and mountainous areas of western United States. Golden Eagles only occasionally build nests on power poles, but utilize poles throughout the year for hunting perches. Some U.S. nesting populations may be in decline as they are killed by trapping, shooting, poisoning and electrocution.

### Identification:

- length: 27-33 inches; wingspan: 79 inches
- dark brown except for golden hackles on rear of head
- rufous undertail coverts
- legs are feathered to the toes
- tri-colored bill and cere
- juveniles has white patches on wing and base of tail
- similar species: Bald Eagle



**Habitat:** Occurs in nearly all habitats from desert grasslands to timberline throughout the American West and across Canada. Nesting usually occurs on cliffs, but can occur in large coniferous trees, associated with open rangeland where jackrabbits, a favored prey, are found. In southern New Mexico, nesting pairs often select steep-sided canyons with sheer ledges.

**Nesting:** Nests are usually located on cliffs; also in trees, on ground and human-made structures such as nesting platforms and transmission towers. Both sexes contribute to nest building, often re-using nests. Egg-laying varies depending on latitude, but usually begins in March in New Mexico. Clutch size ranges from 1-3 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 45 days, and nestlings fledge about 70 days later.

**Diet:** Primarily small to medium-sized mammals: rabbits, ground squirrels, prairie dogs, and marmots. Searches for prey from perches and while soaring. Frequently feeds on carrion, particularly during winter. Hunts cooperatively with other Golden Eagles.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** Mountainous and hilly terrain throughout the state during the nesting season. During the winter season, Golden Eagles can be found statewide and utilize power poles along highways, with open range nearby.

## Osprey - The Fish Hawk

### Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)



The Osprey, or fish hawk, is a large, long-winged bird. It eats fish exclusively and is nearly always associated with large bodies of water. Only a small number of Ospreys nest in New Mexico. They are present here primarily during migration, and during this season, can be found far from water, over open plains. They are large birds that do not need to eat daily. They forage at stock ponds on open rangeland, but have also

been known to carry prey long distances.

#### Identification:

- length: 20-25 inches; wingspan: 63 inches
- mostly white below, with dark patch at wrist
- uniformly dark brown back
- dark feathers create a pronounced eye stripe
- barred tail
- similar species: Bald Eagle



**Habitat:** The Osprey occurs worldwide. In New Mexico, this species is almost always associated with large bodies of water. Nesting Osprey occur at large reservoirs such as Heron, El Vado, and Cochiti.

**Nesting:** They use a wide variety of nest sites, located close to water. Natural nest sites include trees and cliffs, but they quickly take advantage of artificial sites such as power poles and nesting platforms. Nests from previous years are often reused. Egg-laying usually begins in April in New Mexico. Eggs are incubated for approximately 37 days, and nestlings fledge about 55 days later.

**Diet:** Live fish account for 99% of prey taken. Inland, this species forages along rivers, marshes, reservoirs, ponds and lakes, feeding in shallow and deeper waters. Hunts on the wing, gliding 10-40 meters over open water.

**Seasonality:** Isolated nesting pairs found in New Mexico, but present primarily during migration.

**Concentration locations:** The Rio Grande Valley and its tributaries, as well as other river corridors, during spring and fall migration.

## Northern Harrier

### Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)



Northern Harriers are medium-sized, slender, low-flying raptors of upland grasslands and marshes. They fly at low elevations hunting small birds and mammals (primarily rodents). These birds hold their wings in a deep V-shape in flight, and utilize a back and forth motion to flush prey. Collision with power lines is a large concern. They are also known as the Marsh Hawk.

#### Identification:

- length: 16-29 inches; wingspan: 38-48 inches
- adult males have dark gray head, whitish underparts and gray back
- adult females have brown head, tan underparts and a brown back (shown in each photograph)
- distinctive white patch on base of uppertail
- owl-like face with dark hooded appearance
- slow flight close to ground
- yellow eyes in adult male, brown eyes in adult female
- similar species: Turkey Vulture, Swainson's Hawk, Peregrine Falcon



**Habitat:** Breeds in open wetlands, lightly grazed pastures, dry uplands, desert shrub and riparian woodland. The winter range is a variety of habitats dominated by herbaceous cover, including deserts, pasture, dry plains, grasslands and open-habitat flood plains.

**Nesting:** They nest on the ground, usually in tall, dense clumps of marsh vegetation, either alone or in loose colonies. Egg-laying begins in late April in New Mexico. Eggs are incubated for approximately 32 days, and nestlings fledge about 30 days later.

**Diet:** Forages on the wing, capturing a wide range of prey, mainly small mammals and birds, while coursing low over the ground. Known to subdue large prey by drowning.

**Seasonality:** Common in winter, a few nesting pairs in summer.

**Concentration Locations:** During the winter months, large numbers of Northern Harriers occur at wetland areas and along the Rio Grande Corridor. Males tend to prefer higher, drier habitat with shorter vegetation.

## Big Black Birds

### Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)



This species is, technically, not a raptor, but is more closely related to storks. It is included here because of its raptor-like attributes, its propensity to perch on power poles and the inherent associated risks. Turkey Vultures are scavengers and lack the powerful feet of true raptors. They have a highly developed sense of smell, and can locate carrion through scent alone. Turkey Vultures roost communally in flocks of up to several hundred birds and forage socially. These behaviors could make them more susceptible to electrocution.

#### Identification:

- length: 24-28 inches; wingspan: 67 inches
- blackish-brown with red, bare-skinned head (adults)
- juveniles have bare-skinned dark head
- pinkish legs and ivory bill
- wings held in an extended “V” while soaring
- distinctive rocking flight
- similar species: Golden Eagle, Swainson’s Hawk



**Habitat:** The preferred habitat is farm, pastureland, and rangeland with abundant carrion, close to undisturbed forested areas, which are used for roosting, and nesting. This species forages extensively along highways searching for road-kill, making it vulnerable to collisions with vehicles and other threats.

**Nesting:** Lays eggs in dark recesses in a variety of isolated sites such as rocky outcrops, burrows, hollow logs, abandoned stick nests of other species and abandoned buildings. Egg-laying begins in late April in New Mexico. Two eggs are usually laid. Eggs are incubated for approximately 40 days, and nestlings fledge about 70 days later.

**Diet:** Feeds opportunistically on a wide range of wild and domestic carrion. Mammals are the most common food item, ranging from mice and shrews to large ungulates. Also feeds on birds, reptiles, insects and even plant material.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico during breeding season and migration. This species is not known as a winter resident, although large numbers of Turkey Vultures winter within 100 miles of the southern United States border in Chihuahua, Mexico.

**Concentration locations:** None known, found somewhat evenly distributed statewide.



## Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)



The Common Raven is not a raptor, but is included here because it often nests and roosts on power structures, making it vulnerable to electrocution. They frequently utilize power poles as nesting substrate, constructing nests from a variety of materials, including baling wire. It is also one of the most common large birds in New Mexico. It is well adapted and tolerant of human activities, nesting on man-made structures such as highway bridges.

### Identification:

- length: 24 inches; wingspan: 50 inches
- entirely glossy black
- long, pointed black wings
- distinctive wedge-shaped tail
- concealed gray base of neck feathers
- large, black bill, with bristle of feathers at mandible
- similar species: Chihuahuan Raven, American Crow

**Habitat:** One of the most widespread, naturally occurring birds in the world. It is associated with open, isolated wilderness areas as well as urban habitats. This species seems well adapted to humans in some areas.

**Nesting:** Builds a stick-nest in a variety of locations where there are sufficient food resources and adequate substrate. Typically nests in cliffs, trees, power-poles and communication towers. Egg-laying begins in March in New Mexico. Average clutch size is 5. Eggs are incubated for approximately 25 days, and nestlings fledge about 35 days later.

**Diet:** Known primarily as scavengers, Common Ravens are also fierce predators, taking a wide range of animal prey such as rodents, scorpions, grasshoppers, and other insects, even raiding the nests of other birds.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** None, although more Common Ravens inhabit the northern portions of the state while the smaller Chihuahuan Raven occupies much of the southern reaches of New Mexico.

### Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*)



This raven occupies a limited range in the Chihuahuan desert regions of southwestern North America. It is intermediate in almost all characteristics between the Common Raven and American Crow. It is an extremely social bird, often roosting together in summer in groups of up to 500 individuals. They often congregate in agricultural areas, perhaps to exploit food sources more effectively.

#### **Identification:**

- length: 18-21 inches; wingspan: 40 inches
- entirely glossy black
- wedge-shaped tail
- stout, heavy, and blunt-tipped bill
- neck feathers have concealed white base (distinguished from Common Raven)
- similar species: Common Raven, American Crow

**Habitat:** Dry, open grassland with scattered trees and shrubs. Also ranges into unbroken desert scrub, dominated by creosote and mesquite, in eastern New Mexico.

**Nesting:** Builds a stick-nest in a variety of locations including man-made structures such as power-poles and windmills. Egg-laying begins in April in New Mexico. Average clutch size is 5. Eggs are incubated for approximately 20 days, and nestlings fledge about 40 days later.

**Diet:** Mainly feeds on large insects, carrion, young birds, fruits, lizards and small mammals. Will also feed on scraps of human food. Does most hunting while walking or hopping on ground. Commonly flocks to prairie dog colonies to scavenge dead dogs. Will patrol highways to look for road-kills and food scraps.

**Seasonality:** Found in southern New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** Year-round populations occupy much of the southern reaches of New Mexico.

### **American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)**



The American Crow is a cunning, inquisitive, and vocal opportunist, and is one of the most widespread birds in North America. They are found in a variety of habitats, particularly open landscapes with scattered trees and small woodlots. They roost communally, often in the same site for consecutive years. Winter roosts may contain thousands of individuals.

#### **Identification:**

- length: 17-21 inches; wingspan: 40 inches
- entirely glossy black
- slightly rounded tail
- smaller size and less-powerful bill than Raven
- does not have elongated throat feathers
- similar species: Common Raven, Chihuahuan Raven

**Habitat:** Occurs in a wide range of natural and urban habitats, but prefers open areas (for ground feeding) and presence of scattered trees (for safety, nesting and roosting). In New Mexico, frequents riparian and evergreen woodlands.

**Nesting:** Nests are usually well-hidden and located in trees or shrubs in small, open woodlands. Builds a new nest every year. Egg-laying begins in April in New Mexico. Average clutch size is 5. Eggs are incubated for approximately 18 days, and nestlings fledge about 30 days later.

**Diet:** Omnivorous, feeding mainly on invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, small birds, bird-eggs, mammals, grain crops, fruit, carrion and discarded human foods. Obtains most food on the ground while walking.

**Seasonality:** Found in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** Widespread in the state. Large, winter, communal roosts of several thousand individuals can be found scattered throughout the Rio Grande Valley and possibly in other areas in the state.

## Owls

### Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)



This owl has the most ornate feathers of all the owl species, plus an unusual heart-shaped facial disk. Normally a strictly nocturnal species, the Barn Owl has excellent low-light vision, and remarkable ability to locate prey in nearly total darkness. They usually hunt in low quartering flights, not far above the ground, searching for rodents, a favored prey. They occasionally hunt from perches and are susceptible to power line

fatalities, although numbers of Barn Owls encountered are likely to be lower than that of other species.

#### Identification:

- length: 16 inches; wingspan: 42 inches
- heart-shaped facial disk with tan outline, no ear tufts
- black eyes, pupils indistinguishable
- light tan, yellow, and brown feathers on the back
- brown or black speckling on the breast
- light-colored beak (usually white or pink)



**Habitat:** This species occupies a broad range of open habitats, both urban and rural. They may be found at lower elevations in grasslands, marshes, and agricultural areas. They are cavity nesters and search for suitable foraging habitat near an appropriate cavity. Roosting typically occurs in natural tree cavities, cliff crevices, riverbanks, barns, and inside other human structures.

**Nesting:** Nests are usually sited in large tree cavities and man-made structures such as highway bridges, barns, church steeples, and nest boxes, although burrows along soft soil river banks may also be used. If there is enough prey, Barn Owls lay large clutches of up to 10 eggs. Eggs are incubated for approximately 30 days, and the young fledge 60 days after hatching.

**Diet:** They prey primarily on mammals, although small birds are also taken. Hearing is crucial for Barn Owls. They make more successful kills due to sound alone than any other owl. Food is captured by the feet and talons and typically killed by a quick bite to the neck. They have proportionally large mouths compared to the rest of their body, enabling mammalian prey to be swallowed whole.

**Seasonality:** They are year-round residents in New Mexico.

**Concentration locations:** Lower elevations of the state, primarily in grassland or agricultural areas.

## Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*)



The Great Horned Owl is strong, powerful, and highly adaptable. They are wide-ranging, occurring throughout North America. They are easily identifiable by their large size, the presence of ear tufts, and enormous yellow eyes. They are masters of camouflage and are difficult to locate. This is a perch-and-pounce hunter. They often roost on power poles near transformers, positioning themselves as close as possible to the center pole in an attempt to appear inconspicuous.

### Identification:

- length: 22 inches; wingspan: 45 inches
- white throat patch and large yellow eyes
- brown, buff, and black-lined
- obvious facial disk sometimes accompanied by white “eyebrows”
- horizontal barring across the chest
- near perfect camouflage, perched owls can blend flawlessly into a tree
- call is a stereotypical owl “hoot”



**Habitat:** They occur in a wide variety of habitats: deciduous, mixed, or coniferous forests, swamps, orchards, and agricultural areas. They are also found in urban and suburban settings, such as golf courses, wooded parks, or cemeteries. They prefer to hunt along edge habitats, where high perches are available with sparse underbrush.

**Nesting:** They always occupy nests constructed by other birds and modify them in order to create a large enough bowl for nesting. They are early breeders, and the first clutch is usually laid in late January to February. Typically all egg laying is done by early March. Eggs are incubated for 30-37 days, then nestlings fledge approximately 50 days later.

**Diet:** They have the widest prey base of any North American owl. They take prey ranging in size from grasshoppers and other invertebrates to large rabbits, skunks, and birds, including the Great Blue Heron. Prey is killed almost instantly with the owl's talons and foot pressure. Due to their ability to kill prey larger than the owl can carry, Great Horned Owls often cache prey during times of low prey density.

**Seasonality:** Widespread in New Mexico year-round.

**Concentration locations:** Found throughout the state in most geographic locations and elevations.

### Western Screech-Owl (*Otus kennicottii*)



This species is one of the most common owls in low elevation woodlands and deserts of the southwestern United States. It is tolerant of human activity and is often found in residential and suburban parks if suitable nests and roosts are available. Like many other small owls, it nests in tree cavities and is easily attracted to nest boxes. Pairs are generally resident on territories year-round. They have a tendency to roost or nest among the equipment on transformer poles. They also cache food in small crevices, increasing the chance of electrocution.

#### Identification:

- length: 7-10 inches; wingspan: 20 inches.
- ear tufts held upright or against the head
- mottled gray plumage in southern deserts
- bright, lemon-yellow eyes
- feet and toes bristled in southern deserts

**Habitat:** They are typically associated with riparian, deciduous forest. Screech-Owls prefer forests with high cottonwood densities due to the abundance of natural cavities. Proximity to human populations does not seem to be a factor in territory selection.



**Nesting:** Screech-Owls nest in tree cavities and nest boxes in deciduous forests. Pairs often reuse a cavity for many years if it remains suitable. Clutch size is on average, 4 eggs. Incubation lasts approximately 33 days, young fledge about 30 days later.

**Diet:** They take a variety of small mammals, birds, arthropods, fish, and insects. Owls nesting in riparian woodlands also eat fish and crustaceans. They typically begin hunting at sunset, although adults may hunt during the day when young are in the nest. They typically employ a 'sit-and-wait' technique, and respond to the sight and sounds of prey animals.

**Seasonality:** Present year-round in New Mexico.

**Concentration locations:** None-known.

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