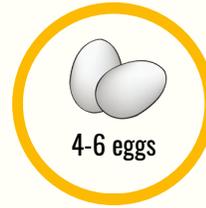
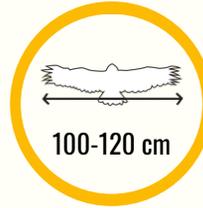




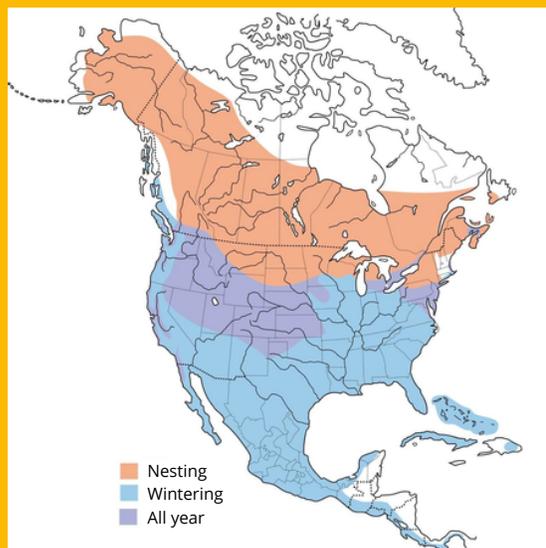
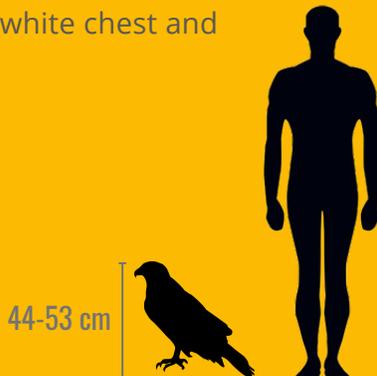
Northern Harrier

Busard des marais, *Circus hudsonius*



IDENTIFICATION

The feathers around its eyes are arranged in circles, forming a facial disk, similarly to owls. This disc helps it locate prey by directing sound towards its ears. The white patch on its rump is very distinctive and helps to identify it in flight. Slender and medium-sized, it has a long tail and long wings. The female has a brown back and brown stripes on her belly and breast. The male has a pale gray back and a white chest and belly.



ECOLOGY

Nutrition

The Northern Harrier is the only diurnal bird of prey in Quebec that hunts by both sight and sound. During the breeding season, it feeds on small rodents, reptiles, amphibians and birds. In winter, Harriers in the northern part of their range feed almost exclusively on voles, while those in the southern part of their range feed on rats, mice and songbirds. Harriers spend around 40% of their time in the air, searching for prey.

Breeding

The nest is built on the ground. It is composed of twigs, grass and aquatic plants. The male can take care of up to 5 females and their broods at the same time. The young leave the nest when they are 1 to 3 weeks old to hide in the vegetation further away. Young males take their first flight at 31 to 34 days old, and females at 35 to 38 days old. The young remain dependent on their parents for up to 8 weeks.

DISTRIBUTION

A widespread American species, its breeding range extends from Alaska to southern Quebec, bordering Newfoundland. In winter, the Northern Harrier frequents the southern United States, Mexico and Central America. It inhabits damp, open areas such as fields, marshes and meadows.

STATUS AND POPULATION

The species is considered secure¹. However, since the 1970s, there has been a moderate decline in its population. Large-scale drainage of wetlands and habitat loss and degradation are threats to the species' conservation.

¹ Wild species of Canada report, 2015