

Manitoba's Species At Risk

Threatened



Any native Manitoba species likely to become endangered or at risk due to low or declining numbers in Manitoba if the factors affecting it don't improve. Threatened species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Ferruginous hawk

Buteo regalis

Ferruginous hawk (*Buteo regalis*) is the largest of North American soaring hawks, with a wingspan of up to 135 cm (53 inches). In flight, the Ferruginous hawk has a light underside with reddish-brown markings on the underside of the wings and on the legs, forming a characteristic dark V against the bird's white underparts. Reddish-brown shoulders and a white window patch on the upper surface of the dark primaries are also distinctive.

The Ferruginous hawk occurs in two colour phases. Dark birds are chocolate brown throughout with a whitish tail and primaries. Although dark birds comprise up to 15 per cent of the population in some areas, in Manitoba they probably make up less than 1 per cent of the population.

Habitat

These birds prefer open areas dominated by native grasses and scattered trees or shrubs, with abundant ground squirrels for food. Isolated trees or some other elevated structure are usually required for the nest site, but the species occasionally uses a highly built-up nest on the ground. Ferruginous hawks typically avoid areas with greater than 30 per cent cultivation, sites that are prone to disturbance, or parkland areas where trees are abundant. However, a few pairs in Manitoba have been found nesting near busy roads, in areas with no surrounding grasslands, or in fairly large clumps of trees.

Life History

Ferruginous hawks arrive in summer nesting grounds by late March. Males usually return first, often coming back to the general area where they were raised. Pairs often maintain the same mate. Successful pairs traditionally use the same nest year after year, but unsuccessful pairs may select an alternative nest within their territory. The nest is built by both adults using large quantities of sticks and roots and lined with dead grass, sod and cow dung. These birds are also comfortable using artificial nesting structures, consisting of a wire basket filled with sticks and

placed in large trees. In Manitoba, nearly three-quarters of the nesting pairs observed since 1990 have occupied artificial nests.

Three to five eggs are laid in late April or early May and are incubated by the female for about 30 days. The male spells off the female on the nest during incubation. Young remain in the nest for six to eight weeks, and are dependent on adults for food for several weeks after they learn to fly. Birds leave their summer grounds in September or October. Young first breed when they are two or three years old. Adults can live for 20 years in the wild.

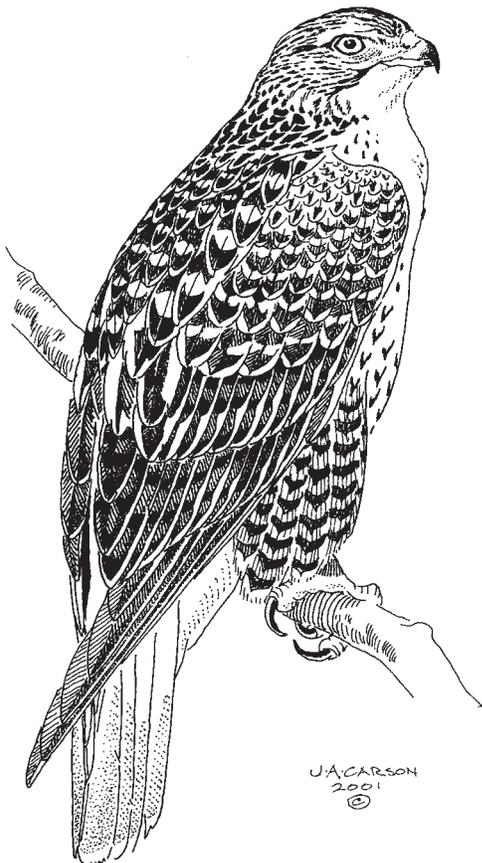
Ferruginous hawks hunt during the day, eating mostly ground squirrels and prairie dogs. Pocket gophers, voles, mice, rabbits and even birds will also be eaten. Adults frequently perch and hunt from the ground, using the sit-and-wait technique, crouching at the mouth of a burrow and snatching up a ground squirrel as it emerges. They also use trees, hydro poles and power lines as hunting perches.

Distribution

Ferruginous hawks nest in western North America, from the Canadian prairies south to New Mexico and Texas. In Canada, Ferruginous hawks are common in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. They are rarely found in southern British Columbia, and have recently re-established in southern Manitoba. In Manitoba, the species is concentrated in southwestern Manitoba, as far north and east as Lenore, Brandon and Glenboro. Non-breeding adults have been observed north to St. Lazare and east to Oak Hammock Marsh. Ferruginous hawks winter in the southwestern United States and in Mexico.

Status

The Manitoba Conservation Data Centre lists the Ferruginous hawk as provincially rare (S2). Although it has declined in many provinces and states, it is considered apparently secure (G4) rangewide by NatureServe. Since the early 1900s, populations in North America have



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Cool Facts

Ferruginous hawks were not seen in Manitoba for a period of about 50 years until a pair was found nesting near Lyleton in 1983. By 1990, nesting numbers in Manitoba had increased to over 50 pairs. Recent declines in nesting success due to reduced ground squirrel numbers resulted in only 37 nesting pairs in 2001.

Nests are rarely more than 15 metres above the ground, but one unusually high nest in a large tree in southwestern Manitoba was nearly 25 metres high.

Heat stress can be a serious problem for young birds in the nest as there is often no natural shade from the sun. To protect her young, the female will often stand with her back to the sun and partially spread her wings over the nest.

Ferruginous and Rough-legged hawks are the only hawks whose legs are feathered down to the toes.

While raising their young, one pair of Ferruginous hawks consume an average of 480 ground squirrels. Although both adults bring food to the nest, only the female feeds the young.



declined to about a quarter of their original estimated size. Habitat loss has reduced its historic range by about 50 per cent. Populations have stabilized and even increased in many parts of the Canadian Prairies over the past 25 years, but the number of birds is still much lower than it once was. Declines are largely due to the loss and degradation of native prairie habitat due to human settlement, agricultural expansion and resource exploration. Ferruginous hawks are susceptible to disturbance by human activities. Adult birds will often abandon a nest, and the eggs or young, if they are disturbed during the nesting season. Other threats include destruction of nests due to severe weather, and predation by raccoons, magpies, crows or owls. Birds have also been known to die from eating poisoned ground squirrels.

Ferruginous hawk was listed as Threatened in 1994 by regulation under Manitoba's *Endangered Species Act*. It has been assigned a status of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC), and is protected in Canada under the federal *Migratory Birds Convention Act*.

Stewardship and recovery

The Ferruginous hawk was listed as nationally Threatened in 1980. A national recovery strategy was approved in 1993. Its objective was to restore and maintain a viable self-sustaining population across the breeding range of the species. Use of artificial

nests by much of Manitoba's nesting population has provided pairs with sites that are further removed from potential disturbance. The sturdier artificial nests have resulted in fewer losses of nests or young birds due to high winds. As a result of population increases across the Canadian prairies, the Ferruginous hawk was downlisted to Special Concern in Canada in 1995. Manitoba continues to list the species as Threatened because there are fewer than 40 nesting pairs in the province and because of observed declines during the 1990s. With continued monitoring of nesting populations in the province, the protection afforded by artificial nests, and some critical nesting areas being protected through conservation agreements, the outlook is quite positive.

Get involved in recovery

If you have nesting or foraging Ferruginous hawks on your property, congratulations! Your land management skills are helping to support one of Manitoba's rarest grassland birds. Please contact Manitoba Conservation at one of the numbers below to find out how you can help them nest successfully and encourage them to return, or to enhance your land for this and other native Manitoba plant and animal species. This could include maintaining grasslands or pastures used by Ferruginous hawks for hunting, avoiding excessive use of poisons that kill ground squirrels (the primary food source of the Ferruginous hawk), and erecting or maintaining artificial nests. Human activity within 200 metres of active nest sites should be avoided, especially between mid-March and mid-June when the birds are most sensitive.

Manitoba Conservation Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch

Box 24, 200 Saulteaux Crescent
Winnipeg MB R3J 3W3
(204) 945-7775

www.gov.mb.ca/natres/wildlife/index.htm

Manitoba Conservation Regional Office

Western Region
Brandon
(204) 726-6450

Partners in production of this fact sheet:
Manitoba Conservation,
Wildlife and Ecosystem Protection Branch
Environment Canada, Canadian Wildlife Service
Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

Extirpated Species

Any species once native to Manitoba that has disappeared through all of its Manitoba range. Extirpated species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Endangered Species

Any native Manitoba species threatened to disappear through all or most of its Manitoba range. Endangered species are declared as such by regulation under the *Endangered Species Act*.

Threatened Species

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Vulnerable Species

Species not regulated under the *Endangered Species Act* but which could eventually be considered Endangered or Threatened if the factors affecting them do not improve.