

Snowy Owl

(*Nyctea scandiaca*)

FIELD MARKS: Round-headed, eyes yellow, bill black. Feet heavily feathered. Lacks true facial disk. A distinctive white owl with varying degrees of dark brown spotting and barring. Adult males are almost pure white, although they have up to three tail bands. Adult females are distinctly barred throughout, although white still dominates. Females usually have from four to six tail bands. Immatures are very heavily barred throughout, and dark spotting may co-dominate or dominate the overall plumage. Intensity of dark spotting varies with the sex of the immatures; females are the darkest. An easy owl to recognize. **SIZE:** 20 to 27 inches. **WEIGHT:** 59 to 70 ounces (3.5 to 4.5 pounds).

SIMILAR SPECIES: Possibly barn-owl; however, the barn-owl has brown eyes, a white bill, and a heart-shaped facial disk. Also, they are rusty or tawny colored dorsally. The short-eared owl may also be confused; however, its overall color gives a golden/brown appearance and it is much smaller. **HABITAT:** Breeds on Arctic tundra. Winters primarily on open plains, and in coastal and agricultural areas. **NATURAL HISTORY:** Begins breeding in May or June. Nests on the ground. Clutch size four to nine. Incubation 32 days. Young fledge at 50 to 60 days. Migratory, but adults tend to remain farther north. **FOOD HABITS:** Primarily voles and lemmings, although capable of taking ptarmigan, ducks, geese, hares, and rabbits. **STATUS:** A regular winter visitor on the plains, but occasionally seen in the inter-mountain valleys.

