

Northern Saw-whet Owl (*Aegolius acadicus*)



Field Marks:

- length: 7-8 in, wingspan: 14-16 in
- rounded wings, and short tail seen only during flight
- white circles around each eye and a white “Y” between eyes and beak
- lacks ear tufts

Breeding Range:

Northern Saw-whet Owls breed in wooded areas in North America, and high elevation mountains in southern United States, Mexico and Central America.

Wintering Range:

Individuals in the northernmost third of the breeding range migrate during the winter, while birds in the middle and southern breeding range do not. Birds breeding along the Pacific Coast may move inland during the winter.

Habitat Preferences:

Northern Saw-whet Owls prefer forested areas of all types, although population densities are highest in coniferous forests. During the non-breeding season, they use more open areas of the forest.

Nesting:

Northern Saw-whet Owls nest in natural or man made cavities with openings 2-3 inches in diameter. The clutch size averages 5 to 6 eggs. Young hatch after 27-29 days, and fledge after 28 days. Young are cared for by the female for the first 18 days, then by the male until the young are independent. Some female Saw-whet Owls leave the first clutch in the care of the male, then find a new male and lay a second clutch. This species is moderately sensitive to nest disruption, and they may abandon eggs or young early in the nesting season.

Feeding:

Saw-whet Owls are exclusively nocturnal, and they begin hunting within one-half hour after sunset. They forage along the borders of open lands and forests, feeding primarily on small mammals, particularly wood and deer mice. Occasionally bird bones or insect skeletons are found in their pellets. They also scavenge larger prey if it is available.

Conservation Status:

Due to their elusive behavior, only rough estimates on population status exist. A conservative estimate of the total population is between 100,000 and 300,000 individuals. Northern Saw-whet Owls are not currently listed as endangered or threatened in any state. The most common cause of death for adults is vehicle collisions. Habitat loss is also a population limiting factor in much of the United States. The introduction of artificial nest boxes may minimize the impact of habitat loss. A measurable number of young are lost to the illegal pet trade.

