

Great Gray Owl

Chouette lapone
Strix nebulosa

Rare Visitor
(observed in the winter in
southern Québec)



Wingspan: 134 cm to 158 cm



The Great Gray Owl is the largest owl in Québec. It is easily recognized by its imposing size and excessively large facial discs. Its round head does not have the crests or ear tufts typical of owls. A black spot is visible under its beak. A thin white collar under its face gives the impression that she has a white beard. The Great Gray Owl has yellow eyes.



The female is generally larger and darker than the male.



The Great Gray Owl lives mostly in the conifer forests and wooded peat bogs. When she migrates into southern Québec, during the wintertime, we usually observe her in the forests near open areas.



She feeds primarily on rodents, such as voles, and more rarely on birds. She hunts mostly at dusk or at night.



The lifespan on the Great Gray Owl is about 7 years, but sometimes more; an owl banded and released into nature was then recaptured later at 13 years of age. In captivity, she can live as old as 40 years!



The Great Gray Owl does not build a nest; she uses the old nest of a diurnal bird of prey or that of a raven. The female can lay between 2 and 6 eggs and the average clutch counts 3 or 4 eggs.



The chicks make their first flight attempt towards 4 to 6 weeks of age. They will remain dependent on their parents for food a few weeks after that.



The Great Gray Owl is considered a rare species; in Québec the few reported sightings of this bird do not allow us to establish the size of its population.



The Great Gray Owl is well adapted to survive the long winters characteristic of its habitat. Its thick plumage protects it from the cold, while its asymmetrical ears and large facial discs allow it to hear mice hidden under the snow. She can locate a prey hidden under more than 20cm of snow, even under a hardened surface crust!