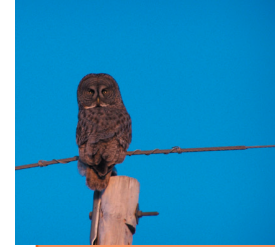




great gray owl



With a wingspan of up to 5 feet, Manitoba's provincial bird, The Great Gray Owl, is the largest owl in North America. It is a rare but regular year-round resident in Manitoba, and is one of the few birds of prey that stay in Manitoba over the winter. Research has shown that it prefers mature conifer forest habitat near open grassy areas. Despite its large size it eats mainly one species of small mammal, the mouse-like meadow vole. Often locating their prey deep under the winter snow solely by means of their extremely sensitive hearing, Great Grays can plunge into the snow in full flight, capturing their prey without ever actually seeing it! When vole numbers are high, Great Gray Owls enjoy good nesting success. When meadow vole populations crash every 3 – 4 years, the owls must migrate up to 800 km in search of food. This affords many people an opportunity to view this magnificent raptor.

The area identified as the Whitemouth Falls Provincial Park proposed addition (see attached map) has been documented as both breeding habitat and an important link in the migration corridor for Great Gray Owls on the move in search of meadow vole populations. The conservation of breeding habitat in southeastern Manitoba is important because this area periodically supports a breeding population of owls migrating in from as far south as the boreal forests of northern Minnesota and Wisconsin to as far north as the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

As a result of the Great Gray Owls' remote breeding habitat, it is one of the top 10 most sought after avian species by North American bird watchers. It has been estimated that between \$600,000 and \$1,000,000 was spent by bird watchers in the Manitoba/Minnesota area to see Great Gray Owls this past winter.

