

Birds of prey

Did you know that the islands of the St. Lawrence River are an exceptional place to observe birds of prey?

The large natural spaces of the islands are ideal hunting grounds for birds of prey. Also known as raptors, they are distinguishable from other bird species by their hooked beaks and long curved claws, or talons. Their sharp eyesight allows them to see small prey up to a kilometre away.

Raptors maintain the balance of the islands' ecosystem by controlling the numbers of small birds and mammals. Since the shallow waters and aquatic meadows bordering the islands serve as nurseries for certain species of fish, they provide a steady supply of food for birds that prefer this type of meal.

Keep your eyes peeled! You may see some raptor species.



Peregrine falcon

Falco peregrinus

Status in Canada: special concern
Status in Quebec: at risk

Peregrine falcons can make long journeys, migrating up to 25,000 kilometres annually. It holds the record for the fastest animal in the world and can dive at speeds up to 320 kilometres per hour. Thanks to numerous recovery programs, the peregrine falcon is experiencing an encouraging recovery from its sharp decline in the 1970s.



Merlin

Falco columbarius

Barely larger than the American kestrel, the merlin can be often mistaken for a pigeon, which explains its scientific name *Falco columbarius*, meaning "pigeon-falcon." It's common to see merlin attack birds that are larger than itself!



Norther harrier

Circus cyaneus

Easy to spot with its elongated tail and white rump, the northern harrier is probably the most representative species of the islands in the archipelago. Its facial disc, which is similar to that of owls, channels sounds and helps it to locate its prey.



Bald eagle

Haliaeetus leucocephalus

Status in Canada: none
Status in Quebec: at risk

When the bald eagle reaches maturity at around five years old, its head and tail plumage turns completely white. Recovery strategies to protect this species, which uses the St. Lawrence migration corridor to feed on waterfowl, fish and animal carcasses, have helped prevent its extinction.



Osprey

Pandion haliaetus

The osprey is the only bird of prey in North America that can dive to catch fish, its main food source. It can plunge up to 1 metre under water!



Red-tailed hawk

Buteo jamaicensis

The red-tailed hawk is the most widespread hawk in North America. It can often be seen perching on a tree or a pole, as this is where it watches for its prey. It is easily recognizable by its broad red, rounded tail.

Flight of birds © Yves Fortin

