

White-tailed Ptarmigan*Lagopus leucurus*

Locally fairly common resident in alpine tundra in the Cascades.



● Year-round

Subspecies: N. White-tailed Ptarmigan, *L. l. leucurus*, in n. Cascades and Mt. Rainier White-tailed Ptarmigan, *rainierensis*, in the s. Cascades.

Habitat: Alpine tundra consisting of moist vegetation nr. snow and/or boulder fields, willow-dominated plant communities, and rock meadows.

Occurrence: A resident of alpine tundra in w. N. America from Alaska s. to Washington, e. to Yukon and to Colorado, the White-tailed Ptarmigan is widespread and locally fairly common in the Cascades of Washington, where it is recorded to 2400 m. Reports of birds in the Olympic Mts. are not confirmed.

Birds arrive on breeding areas in early Apr-early Jun and depart for winter sites in late Sep to mid-Nov. Local populations may migrate between low-elevation winter areas and high-elevation summer areas, with willow buds, leaves, and twigs common diet items. Due to the species' high-elevation distribution, local occurrence and migration may be incompletely known. Birds may move considerable distances: a bird was photographed 30 km from nearest breeding habitat in Yakima Co. (see Stepniowski 1999). Flocks often segregate by sex in winter, with females tending to move farther than males. Males arrive on breeding range before females and defend territories by ground and aerial displays. Loosely organized flocks of broods, unsuccessful females, and males form in late summer.

Reports from non-ptarmigan habitat have usually been due to mistaken identification, but birds are occasionally observed at relatively low elevations in clear-cuts during winter and rarely at locations at low elevations (e.g., Steveston, B.C., at the mouth of the Fraser R., in 1990).

Remarks: There is little evidence of population fluctuations in Washington due to human-related activity, though overgrazing by domestic sheep may be a problem in some areas. Not hunted in Washington. There is a record of a Rock Ptarmigan, *L. mutus*, in Whiterock, B. C., just n. of Blaine, on 9-18 Jan 1976 (Campbell et al. 1990b).

Noteworthy Records: *Core areas:* Whatcom Co., Twin Sisters Mt.: 2 on 16 Oct 1977, 1 on 10 May 1978; Table Mt.: 1 on 13 Dec 1981; Mt. Terror: 1 on 21 Jul 1978, ≥ 1 on 25 Jul 1989; Crater Mt.: 1 on 15 Jul 1985; N. Pickets: 2 on 9 Aug 1971; Copper Mt.: female, chicks on 21 Aug 1991; Mt. Baker: 2 on 19 Sep 1971, 7 on 10 Sep 1973, 1 on 1 Nov 1987. Skagit Co., Cascade Pass: 1 on 13 Aug 1974; Forbidden Pk.: ≥ 1 on 28 Jul 1979; Overdrive Tower: 1 on 23 Jul 1987; Diobsud Butte: ≥ 1 on 8 Jun; Red Rks.: ≥ 1 on 7 Jan 1990; Monogram L.: female, chick on 18 Aug 1994. Snohomish Co., Glacier Pk.: 1 on 26 Jun 1983; Merchant Pk.: 1 on 6 May 1989. King Co., Snohomish Pk.: ≥ 1 on 21 Jun 1980; Big Snow Mt.: ≥ 1 on 21 Sep 1994; Granite Mt.: female, 5 chicks on 25 Jul 1986. Pierce Co., Panarama Pt./Nisqually Moraine: 1 on 13 Jul 1969, 1 on 22 Jul 1970, female, 6 chicks on 21 Jul 1978, female, 4 chicks on 7 Sep 1984, 5 on 12 Sep 1985, 4 on 10 Sep 1988, ≥ 1 on 10 Sep 1989, female, 3 chicks on 9 Sep 1990; Burroughs Mt.: female, 4 chicks on 22 Aug 1973, 4 on 7 Sep 1978, 9 on 9 Jul 1986. Okanogan Co., Slate Pk./Harts Pass: 13 on 2 Sep 1973, 1 on 11 Aug 1976, 2 on 5 Aug 1978, 1 in summer 1984, 1 on 24 Jul 1984, 1 on 1 Nov 1987, female, 5 chicks on 16 and 22 Jul 1998; Ptarmigan Pk.: ≥ 1 on 10 Aug 1991; Cathedral Pass: female, 8 chicks in summer 1983; Tiffany Mt.: 3 on 9 Aug 1988; Chopaka Mt.: 2 females, 6 chicks on 25 Jul 1991; Armstrong Pk.: many small flocks and broods in Aug and Sep 1997 and 1998; Horseshoe Mt.: flock of 7 on 5 Sep 1998. Chelan Co., Sahale Mt.: female, 4 chicks on 6 Aug 1974; Mt. Benzarino: 2 on 16 Sep 1984; Dumbell Mt.: 2 on 13 Aug 1989; Cardinal Pk.: 2 on 24 May 1987; High Pass: 1 on 29 Aug 1968, female, 5 chicks on 18 Aug 1969; Glacier Pk.: 1 in late Jun 1983; Alpine Lakes Wilderness: 1 in fall 1976. Kittitas Co., Bear's Breast Mt.: female, chicks on 4 Aug 1990. Skamania Co., Mt. St. Helens: 8 on 26 Jun 1966, 1 on 22 Jun 1986, and 1 on 4 Jan 1987 (MAS, Armstrong 1994, Hunn 1994, AFN, AB, FN, NAB, WOSN).

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