

# Bird Symbols of Canada

## Part 2

### Québec

#### Provincial Bird: Snowy Owl (*Nyctea scandiaca/Bubo scandiacus*)

Québec adopted the Snowy Owl as its provincial bird in 1987. One of the reasons for this choice was to show support for the province's wildlife protection. This is understandable given that the Snowy Owl's conservation status is "Vulnerable". About the Snowy Owl, the Canada Government website which describes the provincial emblems states that:

*"Unlike other owls, the snowy owl is not exclusively nocturnal. It hunts both day and night, surviving mainly on lemmings."<sup>1</sup>*

Globally, the Snowy Owl has appeared on plenty of bird stamps, but only on one issue from Canada Post. This stamp is part of the "Birds of Canada" mini-sheet series that ran from 2016-18. The Snowy Owl came with the last sheet:

#### 2018 Birds of Canada

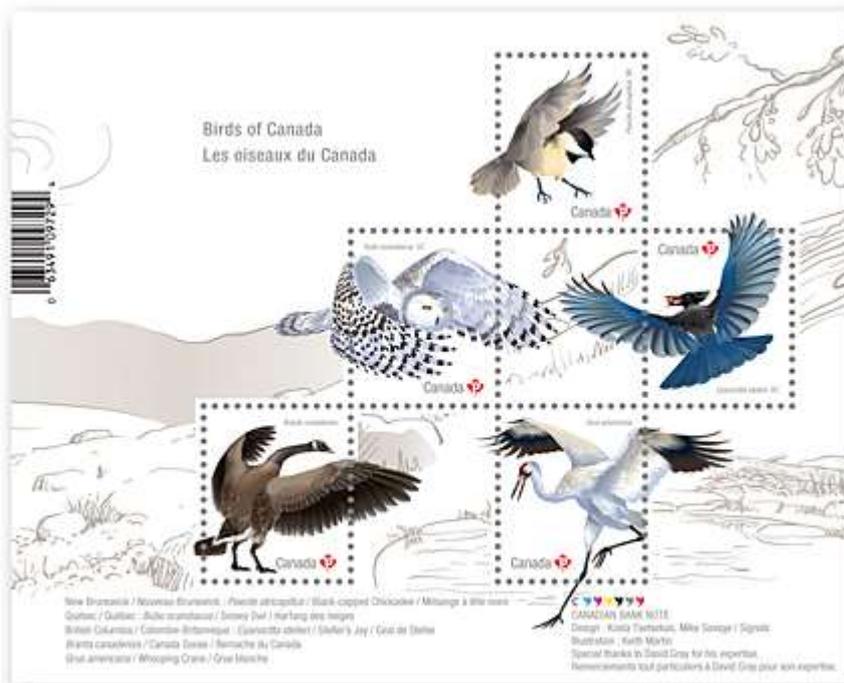


Image source: <https://www.canadapost.ca/>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/provincial-territorial-symbols-canada/quebec.html>

The stamp designs included in this mini-sheet and in the two others (2016 and 2017) were the result of a collaboration between biologist David Gray and illustrator Keith Martin. Canada Post issued some 85,000 copies of the mini-sheet.

Canada Post also released the five stamps in the set, including the Snowy Owl, in a booklet containing 10 self-adhesive stamps (once again priced at \$8.50), valid for use in Canada at the domestic rate. Canada Post issued 400,000 of the booklet stamps, which are illustrated below:

### 2018 Birds of Canada Booklet



Image source: <https://www.canadapost.ca/>

The Snowy Owl is a bird that lives and breeds in the arctic tundra. It prefers lakeshores and coastal areas with marshes, fields and sand dunes in winter<sup>2</sup>. Most of the Snowy Owls remain within their northern range in winter, some do migrate south.

Nature Canada tells us that the Snowy Owl has a rounded head and unlike other owls, has no ear tufts. Other important characteristics are that the Snowy Owl has piercing yellow eyes and a black bill. The adult birds are around 52-71cm long; and weigh 1.6-2.9kg. The females are larger than the males. In terms of plumage colour, the young males get whiter with age. Some males become totally white, whilst others retain flecks of black and brown on the body and the wings. Females are darker than the males, and never become completely white and retain dusky spotting. On the ground, the Snowy Owls appears bulky because its legs and feet are covered with feathers.<sup>3</sup>

The Snowy Owl is a carnivore and as well as lemmings (its preferred food) it also feeds on ground squirrels, hares, rabbits and voles. The also hunt birds, including ducks, grebes and songbirds.

<sup>2</sup> <https://ebird.org/canada/species/snoowl1/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://naturecanada.ca/news/blog/the-magnificent-snowy-owl/>

There are no other Canada Post stamps featuring the Snowy Owl but there are two which illustrate the terrain and habitat which are home to the Snowy Owl. These are:

### 1998 Canadian Scenic Highways – Dempster Highway Yukon (North Western Territories)



Image source: <https://postagestampguide.com>

The Canadian Postage Stamp Guide tells us that the Dempster Highway in Yukon cuts through the Peel caribou migration route where grizzlies, foxes, wolverines, snowy owls and eagles join the migrating caribou in early spring and fall. It winds through two mountains ranges, the Ogilvie and the Richardson, and is the only public road in North America to cross the Arctic circle<sup>4</sup>.

### 1993 Canada Day, Provincial and Territorial Parks: Herschel Island Park, Yukon



Image source: <https://postagestampguide.com>

This stamp features the Herschel Island Park, which was the first territorial park in the Yukon, created in 1987. This island, which covers 100-square kilometres, is located off the northern coast in the Beaufort Sea and is home to some 76 species of bird, including the snowy owl. The circular flow of the Beaufort Sea brings warm, nutrient rich waters which supports the fish population and wildlife – mammals, birds and sea-life - in the park<sup>5</sup>.

There are plenty of other countries have issued stamps featuring the Snowy Owl. However, that statement does come with a qualification: many of the countries represented are from parts of the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://postagestampguide.com/stamps/17061/dempster-highway-yukon-1998-canada-postage-stamp-scenic-highways>

<sup>5</sup> <https://postagestampguide.com/stamps/16736/herschel-island-park-yukon-1993-canada-postage-stamp-canada-day-provincial-and-territorial-parks>

world where you are highly unlikely to see a Snowy Owl. I have limited my sample below to those postal authorities for territories where you are more likely to see a Snowy Owl. These include:

### 2018 Norway



This stamp has already appeared once in our own Flight magazine (March 2020, Vol 34, No 3, page 15) because it was voted the World's most beautiful stamp for 2019. It was designed by Viggo Ree, a Norwegian visual artist who has also contributed at least four other stamp designs that are available on the Posten website<sup>6</sup>. I have included it again here because I do like the artwork, which I think is stunning. Unfortunately, Posten no longer produce gummed stamps, so that is the drawback for me with this stamp.

### 2018 Russian Federation – Great Arctic State Nature Reserve



Image source: <https://rusmarka.ru/en/catalog/marki/position/33142.aspx>

Russian Marka state about this issue:

*“The Great Arctic State Nature Reserve is the largest reserve in Russia and Eurasia and the third largest in the world. It has an area of 41,692 square kilometres, including 9,810 square kilometres of sea area. The reserve is located on the islands and shores of the Arctic Ocean. Among the birds inhabiting the tundra are the snowy owl, the rock ptarmigan, the Steller’s Eider, the brant and rare gull species: the Ross’s gull, the Sabine’s gull and the ivory gull. 100 bird species can be found throughout the reserve. There are 24 mammal species and 25 fish species inhabiting the territory.”<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>6</sup>

[https://eordre.posten.no/OA\\_HTML/ibeCCTpSctDspRte.jsp?section=11365&sitex=10081:50960:US&parentSection=11364](https://eordre.posten.no/OA_HTML/ibeCCTpSctDspRte.jsp?section=11365&sitex=10081:50960:US&parentSection=11364)

<sup>7</sup> <https://rusmarka.ru/en/catalog/marki/position/33142.aspx>

### 1999 Greenland – Snowy Owls



Image source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

This single stamp is from a set of four that celebrate the Snowy Owl.

### 2018 Finland – Threatened Animals



Image source: [www.stampworld.com](http://www.stampworld.com)

This stamp comes from a set of three, the other two featuring the Arctic Fox (*Vulpus lagopus*) and the Atlantic Salmon (*salmo salar*).

One final observation: the RSPB Handbook of Scottish Birds<sup>8</sup> includes the Snowy Owl in its list of “Rarities”. Amongst other things, the entry states:

*“A rare visitor from the Arctic, with one or two being seen in Scotland in most years. From 1967 to 1975 there was a breeding pair in Shetland. Moist sightings are during April and May on the Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles or mainland mountains in the North.”*

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<sup>8</sup> Second Edition, 2016, Bloomsbury Wildlife, ISBN 978-1-4729-6518-9. Text on Snowy Owl on page 248.

