

# Pellet Post

## One million dollars raised!



Winery proprietors Midge and Jim Wyse present a cheque to biologist Lauren Meads, Executive Director of BOCSSBC.

Burrowing Owl supporters Jim and Midge Wyse recently announced a milestone in their support of charitable organizations! Between 2004 and 2017 and as of August 1, 2017 they have raised \$1,029,357!

The majority of the funds go to the The Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC (BOCSBC). Additional funding goes to South Okanagan Raptor Rehabilitation Centre (SORCO), The Nature Trust of Brit-

ish Columbia, and Nature Conservancy Canada (NCC). Jim and Midge thank all those who visited their Tasting Room over the years, and helped put this amazing bird on the road to recovery!



"We're just hanging out with our buddies."

# From nervous hatchlings to confident adults



Story and photos  
**By Tracy Brightman**  
 BOCSBC  
 volunteer

Watching and caring for the Burrowing Owls from first hatching to first flight is a privilege. As the young owls emerge from their burrows and test their wings, we watch with amusement on our feeding visits to the facility.

Every day that passes, more begin to explore with confidence and test their flight skills. Landing seems to be of particular difficulty and although their attempts are still graceful, the positions they end up in remind us more of bats than owls.

It becomes obvious at a point, that they are ready to leave the comfortable safety of their breeding pens and enter the open flyway to explore more of their temporary home.

When we first open the door to the pens, there is a

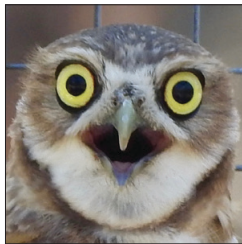
certain amount of hesitation and resistance to leaving the confines of their only known environment. We watch quietly as a few tentatively fly out for only moments at a time, returning frequently to their comforting pens.

Gradually, as their sense of curiosity wins out, they make their first real contact with owls from the other breeding pens. With startled expressions and calls of alarm, they introduce themselves to each other slowly.

Within a short amount of time, they merge into a tight knit group; sharing their space comfortably and seeking out company from more than just their own burrow mates.

As they continue to grow and learn, we watch them play and establish themselves into a comical gang with leaders and followers, flying around with confidence and grace.

Some days though, the landings still need a bit of work!



"Oh, oh, now what?"



"Don't mess with me when I'm eating."



"Oops! I don't think I got that right."



World Owl Conference attendees do a group bird trip. Another WOC excursion sought Evora's nighttime owl inhabitants.



# Lauren and Lia rock the World Owl Conference



**By Dianne Bersea**  
BOCSBC  
volunteer and  
Pellet Post  
Editor

Into a stimulating international conversation about owls and advances in conservation strategies, BOCSBC Executive Director Lauren Meads and Field Biologist Lia McKinnon brought news of the latest progress in BC's Burrowing Owl recovery program. Lauren presented on our BC Burrowing Owl program

to an audience from around the world. Lauren and Lia both reported that it was "great to talk about owls to people from India, Nepal, China, South Africa, Canada, America, Mexico, and all over Europe and the UK."

Lauren also indicated, "We both learned a lot and made some great owl connections. The last conference was in the Netherlands in 2007. All the participants felt 10 years is too long between owl conferences. Hopefully more frequent events will be held in other exciting places!"



Lauren and Lia at the Conference centre in Evora Portugal with Alexandra Froese (RIGHT) of the Manitoba Burrowing Owl Recovery Program (MBORP <http://www.mborp.ca>) and her husband Colin.

## About Évora

Founded in 1559, the University of Évora is the second oldest in Portugal. It includes several historic buildings dispersed through the city, identified by a symbol of a dove. The grand auditorium of the University of Évora is located at the Colégio do Espírito Santo, which was the cradle of the university.

Originally a Roman city, Évora was later fortified by the Moors. Its rich history is represented in its many monuments, like the emblematic ruined Temple of Diana which is the best preserved Roman structure in the Iberian Peninsula.

The Chapel of Bones is another renowned monument



is a mausoleum lined with the bones of the city's ancient inhabitants.

Évora is also a colourful and modern city, with its academic life and vibrant culture. In the Praça do Giraldo, the main square, sixteenth century Gothic architecture blends with modern life.

Beyond the fortress wall lies the vast Alentejo plain. This is an important area for steppe birds and offers great opportunities for birdwatchers.

Amongst the most recognized products of the Alentejo we find wine and cork; a perfect marriage, much appreciated around the world. — Source: [www.woc2017.uevora.pt/](http://www.woc2017.uevora.pt/)



BOCSBC Executive Director Lauren Meads and Field Biologist Lia McKinnon at the conference with David Johnson, Burrowing Owl Director of the Global Owl Project. (GOP <http://www.globalowlproject.com>).

# I got you babe

They say we're young  
and we don't know

We won't find out  
until we grow

Well I don't know  
if all that's true

'Cause you got me,  
and baby I got you

— Sonny Bono, 1965



**By Deirdre Turnbull**  
BOCSBC member

On a trip to Southern California in February this year, I spotted Burrowing Owls near the Sonny Bono Salton Sea National Wildlife Refuge.

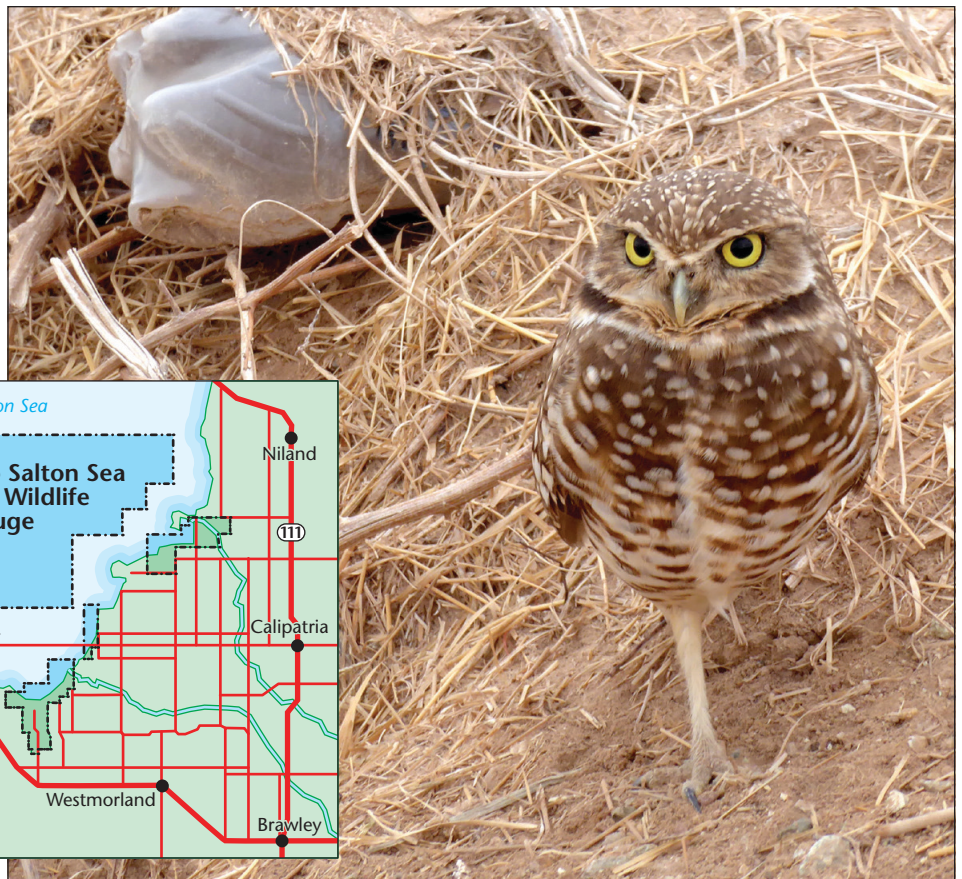
Several owls had their burrows along some of the side roads. The owls were easy to spot when we drove by around mid-day. They were standing outside their burrows, right beside the ditches that separated the agricultural fields from the road.

The owls, while wary, did not seem very timid, and allowed a fairly close approach for photographs. They were often standing on one leg, and at one burrow, there were two owls standing side by side. They appeared to take little notice of the cars and trucks passing by.

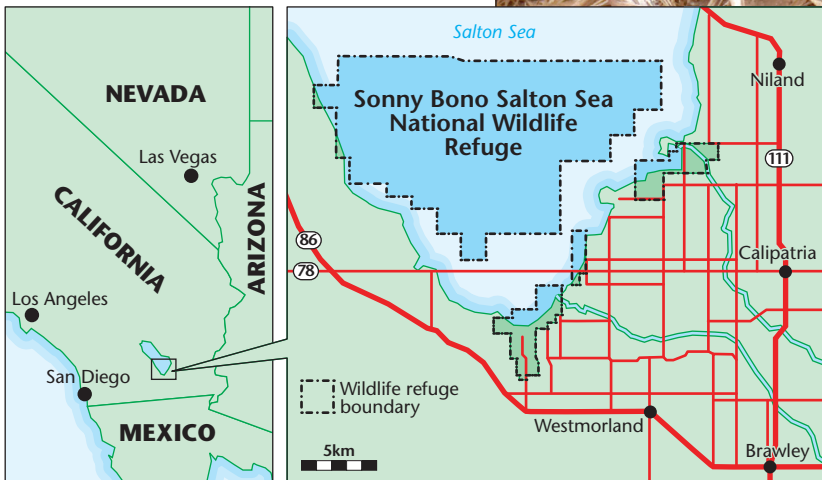
It was delightful to see so many of these lovely little birds, and to know that good habitat is available for them.



California Burrowing Owl doing the one-legged stand. — Deirdre Turnbull



Owl ignores the detritus of the modern world. — Deirdre Turnbull



— BOCSBC map

# A personal perspective on BOCSSBC history

By Mike Mackintosh  
President BOCSSBC Board of Directors  
as told to Dianne Bersea

Mike Mackintosh has been involved with Burrowing Owls in British Columbia for more than thirty years! He's a busy guy with a long history of working with wildlife and wildlife recovery, beginning with his role as manager of the Stanley Park Zoo. A little arm-twisting from the Pellet Post produced a fascinating series of recollections. Here are two excerpts.

## A profound introduction to a wild Burrowing Owl

My first experience with a wild Burrowing Owl happened late in the summer of 1989 on a cold blustery late afternoon on the grasslands. Heavy clouds threatened rain and it was getting dark. I was with one of the wildlife biologists at the time, out looking at the nesting burrow locations.

And there he was, sitting on a fence post, etched against a darkening sky. A tiny little owl, facing us, his brown soft plumage ruffled by the wind. But what was most incredible were his eyes... piercing yellow



Owl Beaker and beagle Molly with BOCSSBC President Mike Mackintosh, circa 1990.

green, vibrant and alive. It was a defining moment for me; to see this tiny little bird of prey, against all odds, finding its way back from a daunting migration.

I was awe-struck, and totally hooked. I saw that we had a huge opportunity to work on the recovery of this endangered species. Kamloops Wildlife Park already had a breeding facility. Now, I arranged for another one in Vancouver at Stanley Park. I then began working directly with Ministry of Environment staff, and

in 1990, we brought the first owls back from Washington State for our breeding program.

It was a great adventure and a complicated one. Burrowing Owls were very heavily regulated and multiple permits were required. We had very little information. There were so many questions, but

## My friend Beaker

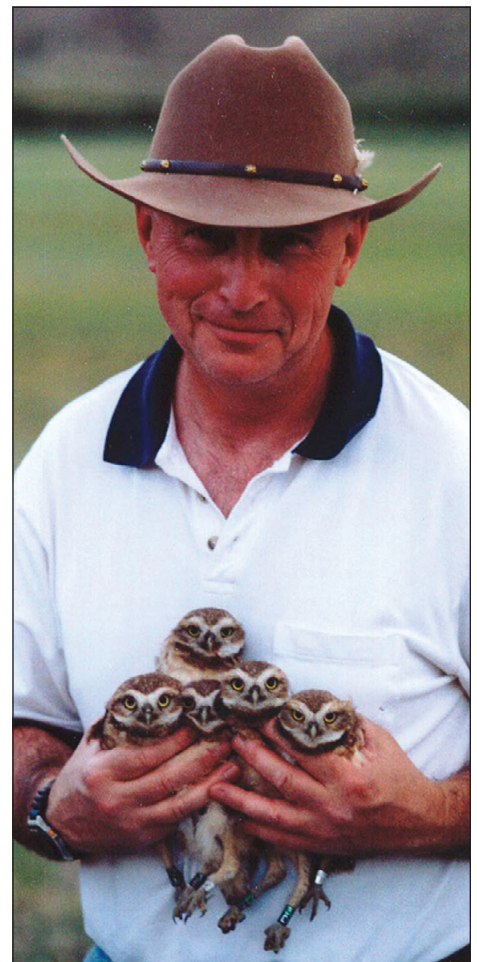
I had the extremely rare privilege of living with a Burrowing Owl for twelve years. Beaker was a wonderful little bird, full of character and animation. As an amazing ambassador for his species, Beaker attended the Canadian Houses of Parliament, the BC Legislature and was adored by thousands of school children.

His best friend was my beagle, and he had his own room in my house though he rarely stayed in his cage... other than to rest at night and eat of course. Mouse guts don't sit well on the sofa!



Education Owl Beaker at home.

over the next 20 years we would learn a great deal about how to breed these owls, how to design their captive habitats.



Mike with a clutch of young Burrowing Owls.

— All photos courtesy Mike Mackintosh

# Burrow diorama offers owl's-eye view underground



**By Dianne Bersea**  
BOCSBC volunteer and  
Pellet Post Editor

Like many others, I've fallen under the spell of Burrowing Owls. I've helped to feed, to clean and to dig burrows, and I have taken on the task of content development for the Pellet Post. Most recently my skills as an exhibit designer were triggered.

At the Spring Open House I noticed a taxidermy display of four hatchlings and an adult female precariously attached to a dusty base.

"Hmmm", I thought. "I can enhance their environment with a portable tabletop diorama."

So I constructed a scale model of my idea for Lauren's consideration. Her response? "It's beautiful!"

The diorama is now under construction and hopefully will debut at the Penticton Saturday Market on Main Street, September 23.



- 1** The author's small scale prototype of the final diorama.
- 2** First phase of diorama construction shows the above and below ground levels.
- 3** The diorama in progress. Above ground section with some sculpting and painting. Note the prototype maquette at the right of the full-size diorama.
- 4** Closeup of the above ground level.
- 5** The work in progress.
- 6** Diorama on display at Penticton Farmers Market.

— Dianne Bersea photos



# All in a day's work

## From Western Rattlesnakes to Burrowing Owls

Banding team in the field



Story and photos  
**By Stephanie Winton**  
 BOCSSBC volunteer

As a conservation biologist and I'm keenly interested in the ecology of at-risk species within human disturbed environments. That means I recognize the importance each species has within an ecosystem.

In my graduate research project on snake road kill most of my time is spent wrangling Western Rattlesnakes, a threatened species in the Thompson-Okanagan. This is why I appreciate that volunteering with the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC provides me an opportunity to branch out and learn about research on other species.

I have helped with burrow construction and supplemental feeding in the field as well



Burrowing Owl scans spring flowers during banding project.

as care of the owls that are part of the breeding program at the BC Wildlife Park. My reward? I've joined owl researchers when they band wild-hatched chicks.

It's gratifying to witness the success of the reintroduction program through all stages of the work. Burrowing Owls are an integral part of the highly endangered grassland ecosystem of BC, like rattlesnakes, badgers, and many other animals and plants. Their persistence is a triumph for conservation.

# Hats off to the landowners

The society's reintroduction program would not be possible if not for the participation of the landowners in the Nicola Valley and South Okanagan who generously allow the Burrowing Owls to be released on their property.

Hats off to the kind folks at Deleeuw Ranch, Haughton

Ranch, Guichon Ranch, Chutter Ranch, Frolek Cattle Co., Elkin Ranch, Douglas Lake Cattle Company.

Hats off to our partners at the Nature Conservancy of Canada, The Provincial Government, Penticton Indian Band and the Upper Nicola Indian Band.



**Pellet Post**

The newsletter of the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC

[burrowingowlbc.org](http://burrowingowlbc.org)  
[bocsbc@gmail.com](mailto:bocsbc@gmail.com)

Dianne Bersea: Editor and reporter  
 Nick Murphy: Design and layout

## Meet the BOCSSBC board of directors

Here is the list of Directors and their roles.

If you would like to volunteer please contact the society at [bocsbc@gmail.com](mailto:bocsbc@gmail.com).

- **Mike Mackintosh**, Vancouver, BC: Chair of the Board and Public Relations and Media Director
- **Jim Wyse**, Oliver, BC: Finance and Fundraising Director
- **Adrienne Clay**, Kamloops, BC: Captive Director
- **Aimee Mitchell**, Vancouver, BC: Science Director
- **Elaine Humphrey**, Victoria, BC: Education Director
- **Cliff Lemire**, Vancouver, BC: Volunteer and Membership Director
- **Dave Low**, Kamloops, BC: Director of Lac Du Bois
- **Jack Madryga**, Merritt, BC: Director at Large
- **John Gray**, Vancouver, BC: Director at Large
- **Rick McKelvey**, Penticton, BC: Director at Large
- **Steve Church**, Burnaby, BC: Director at Large

## Thanks to our sponsors

- Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
- The BC Community Gaming Grant program
- The Burrowing Owl Estate Winery
- Wildlife Preservation Canada
- The TD Environmental Fund
- Canadian Wildlife Service of Alberta
- Special acknowledgment to Toni Hess, for her continued commitment and support of the program for over 7 years
- Mike and Maureen Lipkewich
- Private donations

# Muddy rental stuck, we get brand new truck!

## Spring mudding mishap leads to new BOSCBC vehicle!



Mud, mud glorious mudding in the grasslands.



**By Lauren Meads**  
BOCSBC Executive Director

As some of you may recall we had quite a lot of water this spring.

In the midst of burrow cleaning and the setting up of soft-release cages we discovered some washed out roads which forced us to go through an open field instead. It was probably not the best idea as we discovered that the truck we had rented was two-wheel drive, not four-wheel drive. We got stuck big-time! After five hours we had a total of three vehicles firmly stuck.

Fortunately and finally, we got out of the mud with the help of two more vehicles. Thank goodness for winches!

This propelled us to get serious about an appropriate vehicle for the work we do. After talks with Pentiction Toyota we got a great deal on a lease, and they will take care of any repairs for four years! We also got some neat decals too, don't you agree?

A big thank you to Pentiction Toyota!



Lauren Meads and BOSBC President Mike Mackintosh pose with the NEW Four-wheel drive truck (and cool decals!) from Pentiction Toyota.

### How YOU can support the Burrowing Owl Reintroduction Program

The Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC thanks you for your support and welcomes ANY donation amount.



CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF BC

www.burrowingowlbc.org  
bocsbc@gmail.com



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