

Pellet Post

An awesome Oliver opening

By Jim Wyse

On May 8th, John Slater MLA for Boundary/Similkameen, assisted by assisted by BOCSBC President Mike Mackintosh, and local Director Jim Wyse cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the Society's new Burrowing Owl captive breeding facility located north of Oliver.

The Grand Opening celebrated the arrival of 6 Burrowing Owls, which are the first wave of birds that will be used as breeders. Their off-spring will be released into the wild in future years in a carefully co-ordinated effort to rebuild the local Burrowing Owl population.

In my opening remarks I thanked the people who made the new facility possible. "We are here today to recognize and thank the many volunteers who contributed time and those folks that contributed materials or funding. Without the help of all of these people, this Society could not function and state of the art facilities like these pens simply could not have been built."

A permanent sign bearing the names of all volunteers and donors was unveiled just before the ribbon cutting.

The Oliver facility will be the third in the Society's program, the others are located at the BC Wildlife Park in Kamloops and in Port Kells BC. The best features of each of the earlier facilities have been adopted for the Oliver plan.

The 6,000 square foot cage, has a central monitoring building, where Society biologists can track the progress of the breeding pairs, and 7 segregated breeding pens which connect to the central building by underground tunnels.

Prior to the ribbon-cutting, BOCSBC biologist Lauren Meads gave a presentation of the Society's complete game-plan, from captive breeding, identification and development of suitable grassland release areas, through the spring release and summer monitoring programs.

"There were a lot of really good questions asked today," said Lauren, "and that usually indicates the depth of the interest in what we



(Left to right) Mike Mackintosh, Jim Wyse and MLA John Slater cut the ceremonial ribbon to open the new South Okanagan breeding facility. — Midge Wyse photo



Mike Mackintosh and Beaker address volunteers and guest. — Midge Wyse photo

are trying to achieve."

Mike Mackintosh told the group "Every year we see small improvements in the birth rates and in the return rates after migration. It's a slow process and a lot of research still has to be done, but it's encouraging nevertheless."

In 2010, the Society began to concentrate new efforts in the Okanagan/Similkameen historical Burrowing Owl range and the first 4-pairs of captive bred birds were released at the Elkink ranch.

"This is very ex-

citing when the local ranchers come on board" said Mike. "We are now in a growth phase into this area, and grasslands are what these little owls need in order survive", he continued. "We have identified a number of suitable locations locally for future releases, so when we get the paper work done, the call will be going out soon for volunteers to dig new artificial burrows in readiness for next spring," he concluded.

Undoubtedly, the day's most popular guest was "Beaker", Mike's 8-year old captive bred Burrowing Owl. He is one of two 'education owls' used by the Society, visiting up to 5,000 BC school children every year to create awareness on topics like the loss of native grasslands, a habitat that the Burrowing Owl species needs to survive.



Watch John Slater's legislature speech at youtube.com/watch?v=BUwMgnjoSBs

RELEASE 2011

Letting go in the South Okanagan

By Lauren Meads

Owls are happening in the South Okanagan!

Not only are there 6 male owls at the new Oliver Breeding Facility but lots of great things are happening in the field!

At the Elkink Ranch outside of Osoyoos the first return of the year was spotted.

It was discovered that the owl was the male that had a successful clutch last year in that area.

Again four pairs of owls were released at the Elkink Ranch, and as of May 12, 2011 three nests are being incubated (a total of 22 eggs!) One of the nests is our return male with a released female.

More sites are being investigated this year and the society is hoping to dig more burrows this summer in the Oliver/Osoyoos area.

If you are interested in volunteering please email Lauren Meads at lmeads81@gmail.com

Port Kells roundup

By Nick Murphy

The task of catching and caging the Port Kells owls for release began at 7:30 a.m. on May 14. The previous evening volunteer, Brenda Perazelli had installed trap doors on all the burrows in the flyway of the breeding facility where the juvenile females had been isolated for some weeks.

The first job was to use a plunger to gently force the owls into the nest boxes where they could be easily captured.

Steve Howard, ably assisted by Brenda, Cliff Lemire and Chris Hart managed the collection of the majority of the soon-to-be-released owls. Mike Mackintosh read and recorded bands then secured the owls by twos in transit cages in readiness for their long journey to Kamloops.

Those owls who had not confined themselves to their burrows were gently netted in a corner of the flyway which had been blocked off with a tarpaulin.

This procedure was repeated with the juvenile males who had spent the past weeks in the falcon pen on the Port Kells property separated from the females to prevent unwanted pairing.



An owl has his newly attached band inspected prior to soft release on the Elkink Ranch. — Nick Murphy photo



(Clockwise from left) Lauren Meads releases an owl watched by Sherry Linn, Larry Heard and Catherine Dale. — Nick Murphy photo



Volunteer Steve Howard extracts an owl from its burrow at the Port Kells breeding facility. — Nick Murphy photo



Director Mike Mackintosh checks paperwork while a captured owl makes sure he doesn't make a mistake. — Nick Murphy photo

The owls left for Kamloops in a rented mini-van with an escort consisting of Mike Mackintosh, Cliff Lemire, Chris Hart and myself along with Isabelle

Groc, a Vancouver based freelance environmental writer and photographer.

The owls were delivered to the BC Wildlife Park in Kamloops by 2 p.m.

RELEASE 2011

Clean and release



John Edwards gets down to work, cleaning a burrow in the Nicola Valley. — Nick Murphy photo



(Clockwise from left) Dawn Brodie bands owls while Jill Hockaday and Tian Everest complete the paperwork. — Nick Murphy photo

By Dawn Brodie

The beginning of the Burrowing Owl season starts in early March with several weeks of fieldwork and surveys to be done prior to releasing the captive-raised owls. All sites are checked for returning owls which is always an excit-

ing moment and band identification made. The artificial burrows need cleaning as they may be occupied by rodents or in need of some repair.

The owl program relies heavily on support from many volunteers and staff to prepare the release sites, maintain the burrows and or-

ganize the banding of the release owls. Each owl is banded for identification and has a detailed health check before being paired with a suitable mate.

About 85 Burrowing Owls were released and the field staff is now monitoring the nests for egg production.

We'll keep everyone posted to the successful nests and the numbers of juveniles they produce.

The field workers who participated in the spring pre-release fieldwork contended with snow, cold north winds, wood ticks and black widows deserve a big thank you.



Returning owl 22/C, captured on April 1 at Guichon Ranch. — Nick Murphy photo



Cliff Lemire, Chris Hart and Lauren Meads install a new burrow. — Nick Murphy photo



Hats off to our ranchers

The society's re-introduction programme 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, Houghton Ranch, Guichon Ranch, Chutter Ranch, Frolek Cattle Co., Quilchena Cattle Co., Shannon Ranch and Elkink Ranch.

BurrowBriefs



Ania Radziszewski releases an owl in the Nicola Valley. — Lauren Meads photo

Welcome Ania

The Society welcomes our new field worker, Ania Radziszewski, who will be conducting the field work in the Nicola Valley along with Dawn Brodie and John Edwards.

Ania is a Kamloops resident who has a Master's of Science in Biology and has plenty of experience working in environmental consulting. She brings to the Burrowing Owl Society a great passion for wildlife and its protection.



Look who's squawking

Three owlets await return to their Port Kells burrow on May 14th, while the cleaning crew takes care their mess. The oldest of these hatchlings is 16 days. — Nick Murphy photo

Neat nest counts

One of the society's Port Kells founders may have an obsessive compulsive disorder. When the nest box was opened for cleaning on April 30, the eggs were found arranged in this geometrical formation. Fortunately there weren't a prime number of eggs!

— Nick Murphy photo



Burrowing Owl cover-age

South Okanagan Field Biologist, Lauren Meads entered her photograph of juvenile owls into the Canadian Geographic Wildlife Photography contest. Not only was Lauren's picture chosen for the January publication, it was featured on the back cover! Of course we think it should have been featured on the FRONT cover, but then again our bias may be showing!



Lauren Meads. — Mike Mackintosh photo

Welcome back Lauren

After a brief hiatus, Lauren Meads has taken on a new position with BOCSSBC. Lauren will be working as the society's new site coordinator for the south Okanagan where she will be managing and coordinating the Oliver facility and the field work with the help of volunteers.



GIVE A HOOT!

If you would like to contribute to the Pellet Post, please contact Lauren Meads (lmeads81@gmail.com) or Nick Murphy (nickmurphy@shaw.ca)

Dig it! Fall is the new big deal

By Lauren Meads

The first weekend in October of 2010 saw a large group of BOCSBC volunteers descend on the Beresford site near Kamloops. More than thirty people showed up to dig new burrows and repair older ones in beautiful fall sunshine.

After a very productive day more than 12 burrows were installed or repaired.

Many volunteers were lucky enough to spot owls that had not yet migrated.

In the evening we celebrated in Knutsford with a potluck dinner and a hamburger BBQ provided by Sugar Loaf Ranch.

On display were maps of owl sightings, a slide show images from the preceding



Volunteers take a much needed break between burrows at the fall dig. — Lauren Meads photo

year, past Pellet Post publications and more.

As BOCSBC President Mike Mackintosh explained in his e-mail to members, the board of directors decided to eliminate the big membership event at this year's spring release.

Instead the society is focus-

ing its efforts on a fall dig. There are two main reasons for this: Firstly there are more returning owls in the field each year it is best to minimize contact and leave them undisturbed; and secondly the installation and repair of burrows in the fall gives them

time to settle into the surroundings before they are occupied in the spring.

This year be ready for another fall dig (dates to be announced), where we hope to connect with everyone over owls, burrows, good food and good company!

Hooooo! You know the way to San Jose

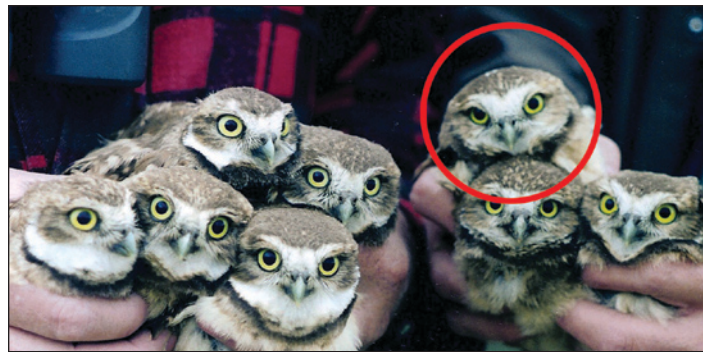
By Mike Mackintosh

See this little guy? Very cute picture, we know. He was one of a healthy brood of 10 chicks, hatched at the Guichon Ranch in 2002. Dawn Brodie, Dave Low and John Surgenor took pictures and banded the chicks before returning them to the burrow. (One other little oddity — the team removed a rubber boa from the pipe as well!)

Besides the great photo, why is this little bird so important? Well, later that fall (2002, remember), our little owl migrated away from his homeland, never to be seen again...

...Until Now.

On December 30, 2010, a biologist in Santa Clara County (near San Jose, California) spotted a Burrowing Owl with a strange band, hopping around on some dirt mounds. Surprise! He positively iden-



The Burrowing Owl (circled) pictured here with his with siblings in 2002 before his travels. — Dawn Brodie photo

tified it as our little male. He has not been seen or heard from north of the border since he left "home". It may be mildly amusing that he took out American citizenship. But even more spectacular, this little owl is now almost 9 years of age, making him one of the oldest wild owls ever to be discovered!

And he's one of ours. We may not always see the fruits

of our labour, but there are these surprising and gratifying little events that give us hope that Burrowing Owls will prevail. One more piece of information to add about the mysteries of Burrowing Owl migration.

As a post script, the researcher noted that this was a major discovery. Finding this owl would help to protect the habitat in the region.



— Nick Murphy map

Along came a spider...

Every spring, volunteers on burrow cleaning duty know that one of the characters they are very likely to encounter is *Latrodectus hesperus*, the Western Black Widow Spider.

Most treat this creepy crawler with the respect she is due if not with downright disdain, but some have quite the inverse reaction as Education Director, Elaine Humphrey makes clear in verse...

The Black Widow Spider

By Elaine Humphrey

I am a black widow spider
I can see that you're impressed
I put fear into many a heart
It's what I do best

I have a set of volunteers
Who come once or twice a year
To engineer homes for us
Hurray, let's give a cheer!

Then along come these
pesky Burrowing Owls
In and out of the holes they fly
Taking our webs and silk
Without an excuse me, oh my!

Elaine seems to think I'm interesting
But then she knows how to tell
A beautiful big female spider
From a puny little male shell

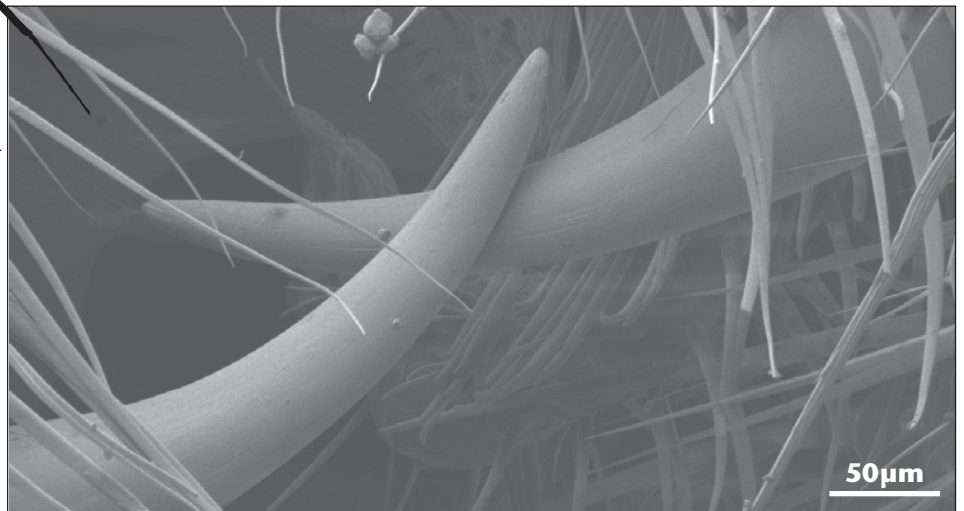
You only have to look at my head
To see my palps like two fingers
A male has swollen sculptured tips
And learns quickly if he lingers

He will be dinner if not a mate
So he has a plan of action
He cautiously approaches
To give me satisfaction

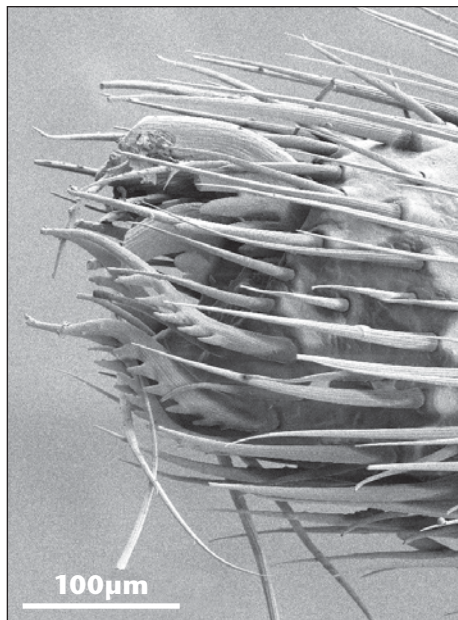
For mating and egg sac laying see
[youtube.com/watch?v=wcdKlgFOPsQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcdKlgFOPsQ)



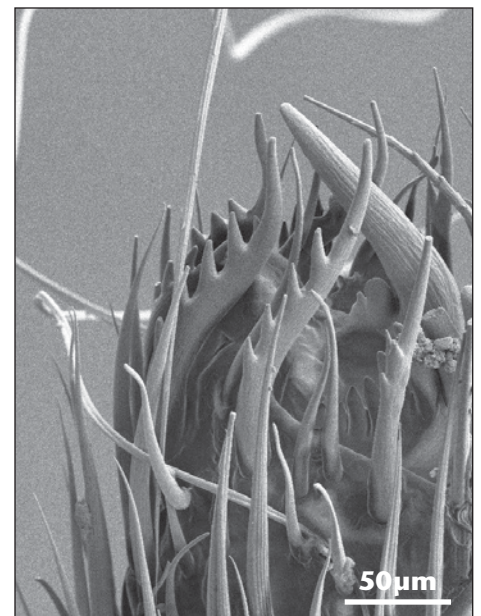
Head of female Black Widow through an Olympus optical microscope. — Elaine Humphrey photo



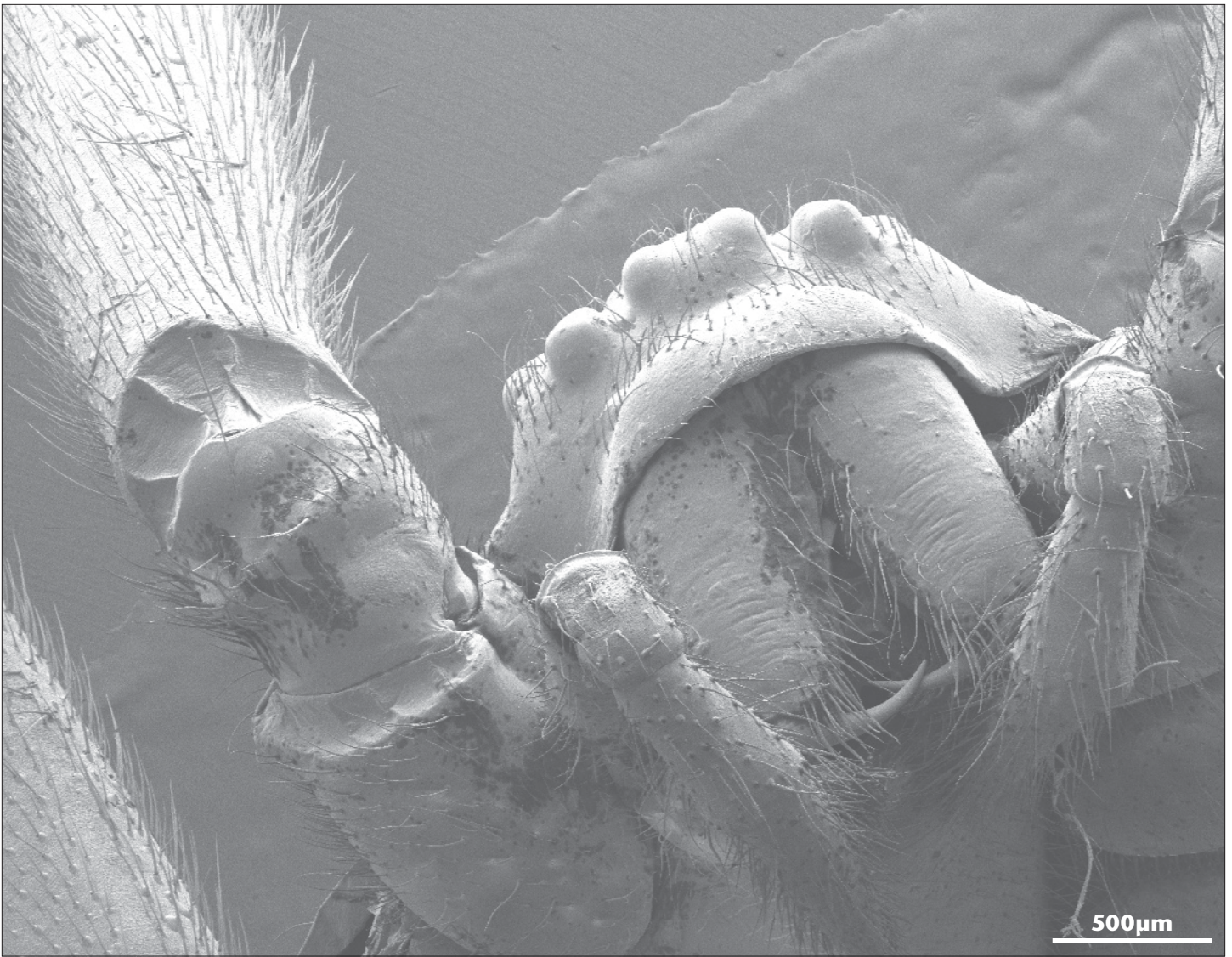
Fangs seen through the University of Victoria's Hitachi cold field emission S-4800 scanning electron microscope magnified about 300 times — Elaine Humphrey photo



Hitachi SEM image of Black Widow foot. (@210x magnification) — Elaine Humphrey photo



SEM image of foot shows combs and silk. (@280x magnification) — Elaine Humphrey photo



Scanning electron micrograph of the head of a female black widow shown here about 50 times actual size. — Elaine Humphrey photo



Olympus optical microscope image of the underside of a female Black Widow — Elaine Humphrey photo



Optical microscope image of the underside of a male Black Widow — Elaine Humphrey photo

VOLUNTEER PROFILE:

Cliff Lemire

Cliff Lemire is a long time volunteer with the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society. Members will know him by his ever present beard and telephoto lens. He has been the society's unofficial photographer for many years.

Q Cliff why did you become a volunteer for the society?

A "Mike (Mackintosh) put his claws into me once and it's been hard to pull them out." he says referring to the time he was press-ganged from his job at Vancouver's Board of Parks and Recreation into moving hog fuel into the Port Kells breeding facility.

Q What makes the Burrowing Owl a cool animal to work with and for?

A Cliff says that there are many reasons for his involvement with the Burrowing Owls. "It's a chance for me to get close to nature and see parts of BC away from my home in Vancouver."

"There's my interest in photography and the owls and their habitat are very photogenic."

"I also like to think of it as 'boot camp', digging burrows is an excellent chance to get some exercise and fresh air in the great outdoors."

Cliff never misses a spring burrow digging expedition or a fall clean-up, and he is famous for his griddle skills as chief breakfast cook at these events.

Thanks for volunteering Cliff. Make my eggs over easy and my bacon crisp.



Neither rain nor snow can keep Cliff from doing his part in the spring work party. — Nick Murphy photo

Meet the BOCBC board of directors

Here is the list of Directors and their roles. If you want to volunteer more please contact the appropriate director.

- **Mike Mackintosh**, Vancouver, BC, Chair of the Board and Public Relations and Media Director
groundowl@yahoo.ca
- **Jim Wyse**, Oliver, BC, Finance and Fundraising Director, *jwyse@burrowingowlwine.ca*
- **Dawn Brodie**, Kamloops, BC, Field Director
dawnbrodie@telus.net
- **Paul Williams**, Kamloops, BC, Captive Director
paulwilliams@bczoo.org
- **Aimee Mitchell**, Vancouver, BC, Science Director
athene.aimee@gmail.com
- **Elaine Humphrey**, Victoria, BC, Education Director
ech@uvic.ca
- **Rosemarie Tirshman**, Vancouver, BC, Volunteer and Membership Director
bocsbc@gmail.com
- **Dave Low**, Kamloops, BC, Director of Lac Du Bois
helga-dave@shaw.ca

Thanks to our sponsors

- Habitat Stewardship Program for Species at Risk
- The Burrowing Owl Wineries – Jim Wyse
- Wildlife Preservation Canada – Elaine Williams
- Canadian Wildlife Service of Alberta
- Special acknowledgment to Toni Hess, for her continued commitment and support of the program for over 6 years
- Mike and Maureen Lipkewich
- Private Donations

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

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