

Pellet Post



IOC 2018 in Vancouver

Executive Director, Lauren Meads presents BOCSSBC's giant poster at the International Ornithological Congress. – Cliff Lemire photo

By Lauren Meads

At the end of August, Vancouver played host to the International Ornithological Congress 2018 (IOC). The City of Vancouver sponsored the concurrent Vancouver Bird Festival.

It was a great pleasure to attend this worldwide conference with 1,600 other people. By far the largest and busiest conference I have ever attended, there were so many multiple talks and events happening at once that it was hard to decide where to go!

BOCSSBC presented a poster which was well received and we also had a booth at one of the openings of the Bird Festival at the Vancouver Public



Midori Nicholson

Library where our education owl Luna and Society President, Mike Mackintosh greeted bird lovers.

Highlights at the IOC included presentations from around the world. Special

standouts were those from two wonderful women who spoke about conserving birds from opposite ends of the earth.

Midori Nicholson is a First Nations woman and is Fisheries Manager for the Musgamagw Dzawada'enuxw Fisheries Group whose territory spans the Broughton Archipelago. She highlighted the importance of birds to the fishing culture of the Kwakwaka'wakw people.

Purnima Barmen, is a young bird researcher in India. Since 2007 she has worked to develop a revolutionary conservation movement which has been able to change local culture. She has empowered local women, creating a group called the Har-



Purnima Barmen

gila Army to save the endangered Greater Adjutant Stork in Assam.

Read more about Barmen's work here [▶news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/storks-science-india-animals-rare/](https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/08/storks-science-india-animals-rare/)

Government proposes ban on strychnine gopher poison

Health Canada is proposing an end to the use of strychnine to control ground squirrels following a scheduled re-evaluation under the Pest Management Regulatory Agency.

The department says that while strychnine kills ground squirrels, commonly also known as gophers, it also kills non-target species that might eat either the poison-treated grain used to attract gophers or scavengers that eat the dead rodents.

Risk assessment shows that endangered species including Burrowing owls and Swift Foxes can be affected. Songbirds, eagles, hawks, owls, ravens, coyotes and dogs have died as a result of either eating poisoned bait or from secondary poisoning from eating dead gophers.

The document suggests that the number of non-target animals affected by strychnine use is difficult to determine and is likely underestimated.

Two types of products are registered in Saskatchewan and Alberta to control gophers: ready-to-use baits and a two percent concentrate that can be mixed into grain by users. Manitoba no longer permits the use of strychnine.



According to Health Canada regulations, strychnine product labels must instruct users to monitor fields after application and burn or bury any treated bait or poisoned carcasses found on the surface. However the proposal notes the difficulty of monitoring large areas and collecting carcasses

before they are claimed by scavengers.

There are alternatives available for control including anti-coagulant baits, zinc phosphide baits, aluminum phosphide fumigant and white mustard seed powder and sodium alpha-olefin sulfonate used as foam.

Other strategies for gopher control include shooting, trapping, installing raptor platforms and altering fields to provide better predator habitat.

Get involved

The consultation is open for comment from 29 June 2018 to 27 September 2018 (90 calendar days).

To comment:

Step 1 Request the full consultation document to read the Science Evaluation that is the basis of this proposed regulatory decision.

Step 2 Submit comments to the PMRA Publications Section.

For more information follow the Health Canada link below.

- ▶ www.producer.com/2018/08/strychnine-ban-for-gophers-pondered/
- ▶ www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety/pesticides-pest-management/public/consultations/proposed-re-evaluation-decisions/2018/strychnine.html

Flooding, freezing, frying: Climate change impacting owls

This year we had high hopes for great success, however early flooding, and cold conditions mixed with very hot weather impacted the owls' nests and their prey source.

BOCSBC had numerous adults start nests, however many quickly abandoned them.

We also had close to 30 returns again this year, sadly however, again many

did not have successful nests. In talking with colleagues in the US, this has also been happening in their areas. We are investigating the causes and how we can mitigate this.



BOCSBC Calendar Events planned for this fall...



In partnership with WWF Canada, we have organized three opportunities to take meaningful action.

To support the owls' survival in the wild upon release, volunteer teams construct artificial burrows for the owls' to nest in. Normally Burrowing owls would use old Badger holes, but Badgers are unfortunately also endangered.

Fall is a perfect time to install and/or repair burrows for the owls as they have migrated to their wintering grounds in California and even into Mexico.

To secure your participation in these events, please sign up with WWF-Canada here http://www.wwf.ca/what_you_can_do/be_a_wildlifer.cfm#bc.

Who knows, you may see an owl!

In addition to helping a species at risk, you'll be entered in a draw for a \$150 gift certificate (plus added treats) from the Burrowing Owl Estate Winery or one of six WWF-Canada adoption kits.

The more you participate, the more often your name is entered into the draw! One entry for:

Each event that you participate in.

Each friend that you recruit to help in a minimum of one event.

EVENT #1 Help the owls at our breeding facility

When: Saturday September 8

Time: 10am to 2pm (including facilitated group discussion from 1 to 2pm)

Where: Oliver breeding facility behind SORCO [MAP LINK▶bit.ly/2AgVylJ](http://bit.ly/2AgVylJ).

Tasks: Building burrows for the owls in our breeding facility. This would require knowledge of building, especially the use of power tools for cutting, gluing, screwing and more. If you are a handyperson we would love to have you participate!

Food: Lunch provided.

Maximum volunteer capacity: 25 people

Gear: Wear comfortable closed toed hiking footwear, and appropriate clothing based on the outside weather conditions.

EVENT #2 Help the owls in the South Okanagan

When: Friday October 5

Time: 9am to 4pm (including facilitated group discussion from 3 to 4 pm)

Where: Osoyoos Visitor Centre [MAP LINK▶bit.ly/2OkT4Mt](http://bit.ly/2OkT4Mt) to meet and carpool to site.

Tasks: Installing burrows into a well-established site, and removing invasive plants from burrow entrances vegetation control near burrow entrances. If you have ever wanted to see how the program works, this is a great way to see conservation in action.

Food: Lunch provided.

Maximum volunteer capacity: 30 people

Gear: Wear comfortable closed toed hiking footwear, and appropriate clothing based on the outside weather conditions.

EVENT #3 Help the owls in the Nicola Valley

When: Saturday October 13

Time: 8am to 3pm (including facilitated group discussion from 2 to 3 pm).

Where: Quilchena Resort near Merritt [MAP LINK▶bit.ly/2NRg9Fk](http://bit.ly/2NRg9Fk) to meet and carpool to site

Tasks: Replacing old burrows with our new burrow system onto a well-established site, and removing invasive plants from burrow entrances vegetation control near burrow entrances. If you have ever wanted to see how the program works, this is a great way to see conservation in action.

Food: Lunch provided

Maximum volunteer capacity: 30 people

Gear: Wear comfortable closed toed hiking footwear, and appropriate clothing based on the outside weather conditions (generally long pants and layers).



With support from Nature Conservancy of Canada we have an event planned:

EVENT #4 Help the owls in the South Okanagan

When: September 15

Time: 8am to 2pm

Where: Sage and Sparrow Conservation Area, British Columbia

Tasks: Habitat Restoration

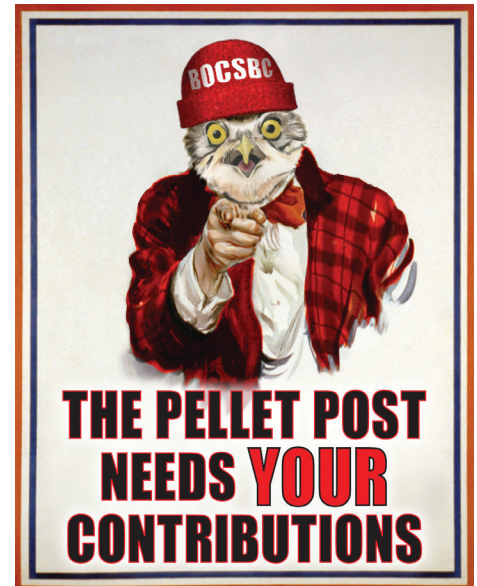
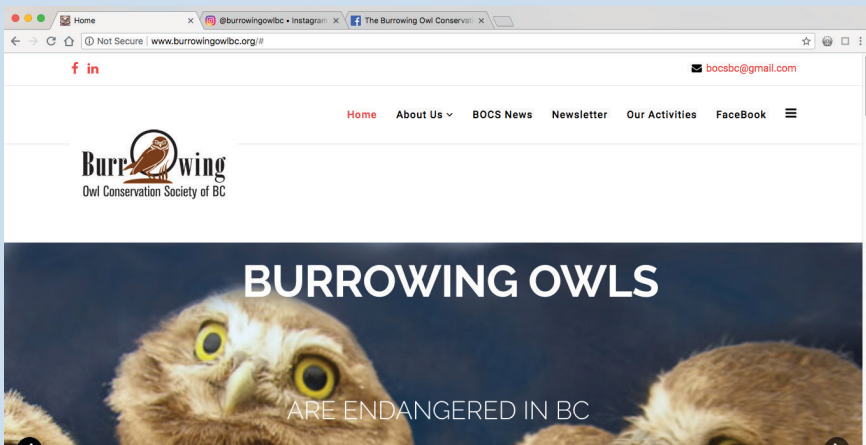
This event will focus on installing burrows for Burrowing owls. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) is partnering with the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC to reintroduce these owls to BC's grassland ecosystems. NCC has previously done work with Burrowing owls on this conservation area, as well as in Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Sign up for this event by going to: events.natureconservancy.ca/al-event/burrowing-for-the-owls/

The **BOCSBC website** has a fresh new look.

Please check it out at www.burrowingowlbc.org!

Thanks go out to our volunteer Heather Clay for her hard work on the new site.



BurrowBriefs

Google cat lovers accused in Burrowing owl deaths

The New York times — May 26, 2018
The Daily Telegraph — May 28, 2018

A well-intentioned effort by Google workers to care for Silicon Valley feral cats has had a disastrous effect on the local Burrowing owl population.

Environmentalists have condemned the efforts of the Google employee group, claiming that rescued cats are killing the owls in nearby Shoreline Park, a 750-acre wildlife refuge.

A handful of Burrowing owls make their nests in the long grass next to Google's Mountain View offices, south of San Francisco.

The cats have been released by an employee group called GCat Rescue, which traps feral cats, putting captured kittens and tame adults up for adoption. Aggressive adults are neutered and released.

Feeding stations are set up near the offices, a process the group describes as "colony care".

On its website GCat Rescue says: "Neutering and colony care... stop nuisance behaviours like fighting, screaming, spraying, roaming, hunting, etc..." but scientists dispute the claim, saying cats

continue to hunt despite access to feeding stations.

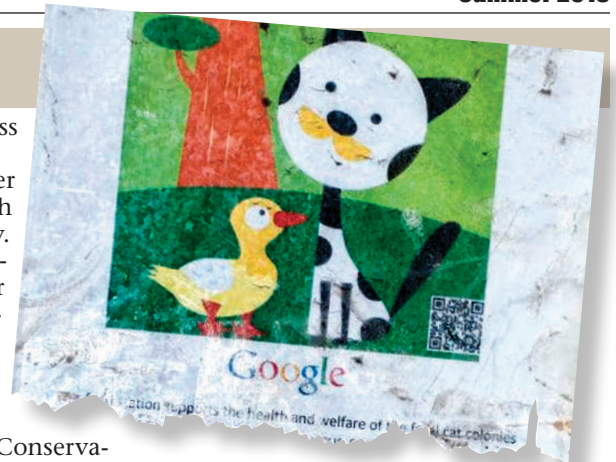
The process of trap, neuter and return is popular with cat lovers across the country. Others say it is merely an excuse for feeding ferals rather than euthanizing them. Estimates of the number of feral cats in the United States range from 30 million to 80 million.

Travis Longcore, lead author of a 2009 paper in the journal Conservation Biology that was critical of trap, neuter and return, said the information on the GCat Rescue website was wrong.

"Cats that are fed still hunt. Even neutered cats and spayed cats hunt. If you have an outdoor cat sanctuary, you can expect there to be consequences to the native wildlife," said Longcore.

Johanna van de Woestijne, a retired medical researcher and amateur photographer, said "They are instinctive predators and I've seen the cats in full pursuit, as well as in ambush pouncing mode, just 100ft from a fully stocked 24/7 drop down feeding station."

Eileen McLaughlin, of the Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, said Shoreline Park was a crucial habitat for the dwindling Burrowing owls. "If we want our wildlife we have to recognise that these cats are people-dependent, and the people who maintain these col-



Google employee group GCat Rescue poster found on a cat feeding station.

onies are actually facilitating their ability to survive outside."

McLaughlin and the Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society asked Google to remove the cat feeding stations in 2012. She said that Google had been an excellent partner on other wildlife issues but had failed to respond when her organization asked for cat feeding stations to be removed, and presented evidence of the damage to the owl population.

"They told us it was something their employees were doing and they couldn't interfere."

- ▶ www.nytimes.com/2018/05/26/technology/google-cats-owls.html
- ▶ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/05/28/cat-lovers-google-blame-dwindling-burrowing-owl-population-say/

Florida builder faces felony charges

Winknews — July 6, 2018

A builder in Cape Coral Florida is facing six felony charges after allegedly disturbing Burrowing owl nests.

Pascha Donaldson of Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife says the charges are unique because the person accused of the crime actually got caught.

Officers of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission claimed, "the construction manager was aware that the burrows existed, but allowed construction to occur directly next to the burrows anyway."

Donaldson adds that the hefty charges should be a reminder to everyone just how protected burrowing owls happen to be in SWFL.



— BOCsBC map

"They've gone up from species of special concern to threatened. So the penalties are very stiff. You get fined, jail time. Third-degree felony. The state is very serious about protecting the animals," Donaldson said.

Construction in Florida is permitted on Burrowing owl nests only if no animals are inside the burrows.

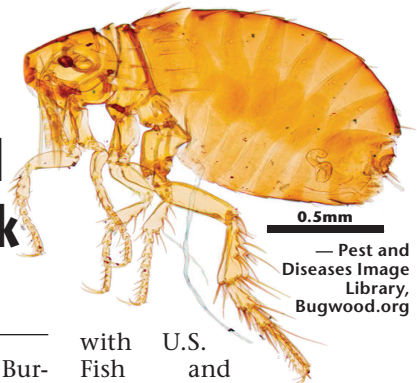
- ▶ www.winknews.com/2018/07/06/cape-coral-builder-faces-felony-charges-after-disturbing-burrowing-owl-homes/

Infested Burrowing Owls treated at safari park

Times of San Diego — July 10, 2018

Two family groups of Burrowing owls were brought to the San Diego Zoo Safari Park to receive treatment for a dangerous parasite, zoo officials announced Tuesday.

In recent weeks Researchers with the zoo's Institute for Conservation Research noticed that some birds showed visible infestation of the sticktight flea (*Echidnophaga gallinacea*), a parasite commonly found in poultry. It's likely at least one owl died because of the fleas, according to researchers. Zoo personnel teamed



— Pest and Diseases Image Library, Bugwood.org

with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials to care for the infested owls, many in critical condition, at the Safari Park medical center. They were rehabilitated before eventually being released back into the wild.

Researchers worked with Safari Park Integrated Pest Management staff to reduce the amount of parasites where the birds live.

- ▶ timesofsandiego.com/life/2018/07/10/sickened-burrowing-owls-successfully-treated-at-safari-park/

BurrowBriefs

Arizona nonprofit saves Burrowing owls from freeway construction

Fox 10 News Phoenix
— May 8, 2018

Freeway construction in Southern Phoenix is having a big impact on Burrowing owls. The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and a Valley nonprofit are making sure the owls don't get buried alive.

The South Mountain Freeway is the largest highway project in Arizona history, a 22-mile freeway to help eliminate congestion, but it's already eliminated homes of the Burrowing owls.

Bob Fox is the founder of Wild At Heart, a wildlife rehabilitation center in Cave Creek that cares for orphaned and injured birds of prey.

"Very often, without awareness, people could come in and bulldoze the ground, and the birds would be buried alive, their homes would be destroyed, they'd have no place to go. So then they would be out in an area that was not suitable for them and would not survive," said Fox.

Wild At Heart houses over a hundred Burrowing owls at his nonprofit. The birds aren't sick or injured, they have been pushed out of their homes by the freeway expansion. Over the past 30 years, Burrowing owl numbers have taken a nosedive, largely due to urban expansion.

Burrowing owls are endangered in Minnesota, threatened in Colorado, and a "Species of Concern" in eight states, including Arizona. When the South Mountain Freeway project was announced, Fox and his team rolled up their sleeves.



"... any time a Burrowing owl was seen near an impacted area, I would get the call, and we go out and remove it," said Fox, who has been working with ADOT for over a year to safely capture the owls along the freeway footprint.

ADOT spokesman Dustin Krugel says crews are trained to spot Burrowing owls, and stop construction immediately if they find one.

"We had over 90 surveys done that covered 3,500 acres looking for Burrowing owls, and that's actually double the footprint of the South Mountain Freeway," said Krugel.

So far, ADOT has found about 50 Burrowing owls, five times more than their average project. They've found adults, young, and even eggs, many less than a hundred feet from the freeway.

Birds are transported to Wild At Heart, and live there for about nine months. Then volunteers build them a new home.

Owls are tagged for tracking by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Ideally, the owls will mate on site, and when the netting comes off, they'll raise their young in a new, safer habitat. As Burrowing owls elsewhere lose their homes, Fox and his volunteers will continue lending mother nature a hand.

"That's the one thing that I'm most proud of, is the response of the public to an issue and how much people really care about our wildlife issues," said Fox.

► www.fox10phoenix.com/news/arizona-news/adot-valley-nonprofit-steps-up-to-save-owls-from-south-mountain-freeway-construction



Meet the BOCsBC board of directors

Here is the list of Directors and their roles. If you want to volunteer please contact the society at 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
- **Steve Church**, Burnaby, BC: Director at Large

Thanks to our sponsors...

- The BC Community Gaming Grant program
- The Burrowing Owl Winery
- Canadian Wildlife Service of Alberta
- Special acknowledgment to Toni Hess, for her continued commitment and support of the program for over 8 years
- Mike and Maureen Lipkewich
- Telus
- Toyota Penticton
- Private donations

... and our partners

- Monika and Frank Toksdorf
- BC Wildlife Park
- SORCO: Raptor Rehab Centre
- Okanagan Similkameen Stewardship Society



Pellet Post

The newsletter of the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC
burrowingowlbc.org
bocsbc@gmail.com

Lauren Meads: Executive Editor
Nick Murphy: Design and layout

Hats off to the landowners

The society's re-introduction 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, Houghton Ranch, Guichon

Ranch, Chutter Ranch, Frolek Cattle Co., Elkink Ranch and Douglas Lake Cattle Company, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Nature Trust of BC, The Province of BC, Penticton Indian Band and Upper Nicola Band.

