**Burrowing Owl**

**Athene cunicularia**

**DESCRIPTION**

- Small, ground-dwelling owl (23–28 cm)
- Round head lacking ear tufts, white chin stripe
- Yellow eyes
- Body brown with pale/white bars and spots
- Long legs, stubby tail, large wings

**WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU SEE AN OWL OR BURROW**

- Keep your distance. Retreat at least **50 METRES** from the owl/burrow.
- Do not approach a natural or artificial burrow. This buffer is especially important during nesting season which is **APRIL 1ST TO SEPTEMBER 1ST**.
- Leave the area and contact the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of British Columbia at bocsbc@gmail.com to report date, time and location of observation.

**DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT**

- Presently confined to areas within the Thompson-Okanagan Plateau
- Elevation 335 – 1,250 m
- Important habitat includes short grass and sparsely vegetated areas with available burrows located near densely vegetated areas to supply adequate prey
- Associated with grasslands and semi-arid desert landscapes

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Please visit the Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of British Columbia at: [https://www.burrowingowlbc.org/](https://www.burrowingowlbc.org/) or contact bocsbc@gmail.com

**REFERENCES**

- British Columbia Conservation Data Centre

**CONSERVATION STATUS**

- **B.C. LIST:** Red
- **COSEWIC:** Endangered (April 2017)

**PHOTO CREDITS**

Cover: Burrowing Owls on fence by Lauren Meads
Inside gate: Burrowing Owl by Lauren Meads
Inside left: Burrowing Owl by Lauren Meads
Inside centre: Artificial burrows by FLNRORD, Juveniles by artificial burrow by Lauren Meads
Inside right: Burrowing owls before release by FLNRORD
Back: Burrowing owls by FLNRORD
**DIET**

- Prey mostly on insects and small mammals
- During the day, prey on insects near the burrows
- At night forage for small mammals

**THREATS**

- Decline in suitable grassland habitat due to agricultural and urban development.
- Decline in natural burrows available due to persecution of burrowing mammals.
- Insecticide and rodenticide use
- Increased predation—due to increase in the abundance of coyote and avian predation; Red-tailed Hawks and other raptors.
- Poaching or accidental shooting (mistaken for ground squirrels)
- Vehicle collisions

---

**FUN FACTS**

- Burrowing owls do not dig their own burrows but occupy burrows made by mammals (i.e. badger, coyote, marmot)
- Burrowing owls line their nesting burrows with cow chips to attract insects (for eating). This is also believed to reduce predation by masking their scent to avoid detection

**BURROWING OWL CONSERVATION SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The Burrowing Owl Conservation Society of BC is an environmental organization working to restore a self-sustaining population of burrowing owls to the southern interior grasslands of B.C.

**WHAT WE DO:**

- RAISE and care for owls by breeding populations and raising them in facilities for release
- CREATE habitat by constructing artificial burrows for the released owls
- PROMOTE grassland biodiversity – promote habitat enhancement activities and develop education programs for the public
- INSPIRE conservation

---

**MIGRATORY CYCLE**

- April to May: Return to breeding areas
- late-April to late-May: Egg laying begins
- mid-May to late-June: Hatching occurs
- mid-July: Young emerge from nest
- September and October: Migration occurs

---

**OWL AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES**

Humans can pose a threat to the survival and reproduction success of burrowing owls by getting too close to owls and their burrows. Stay at least 50 m away from owls and burrows. If you are too close:

- The owls may abandon their nests, especially early in the nesting season during territorial establishment, courtship, and incubation
- The young can be distracted and become easy targets for aerial predators
- The adults waste energy and hunting time while in defense-mode
- The adults may fly away from the nests, leaving themselves and young owls at risk of predation

**WILDILFE ACT**

Burrowing owls are listed as an endangered species under the *Wildlife Act*. Burrowing owl nests are protected year-round under Section 34 of the *Wildlife Act*.

“MOLESTATION” IS AN OFFENCE UNDER BRITISH COLUMBIA’S *Wildlife Act*.

Activities near nests may be considered molestation if they result in birds abandoning their nests!