

Scientific Name: *Athene cunicularia*

Syn: *Speotyto cunicularia*

Common Name: Burrowing Owl

Alt Com Name: Chouette des terriers

Element ID: 8919

Taxonomy

Taxonomic class: Aves

Order: Strigiformes

Family Name: Strigidae

Genus Name: Athene

Family Common Name:

Genus Common Name:

Taxonomic Comments:

Ranking and Protection Status

Global Rank: G4

COSEWIC Status: Endangered

Provincial Rank: S2B

Provincial Protection Status: ENDANGERED

Diagnostic Characteristics

Identification Comments:

The Burrowing Owl, also known as the Ground Owl, is about 23 centimeters tall and weighs between 125 to 185 grams, or 150 grams on average. It is slightly larger than a robin. These owls have a round head with large yellow eyes and no ear tufts. They have long, slim legs and a short tail. The body feathers are light to dark brown with white spots and the under parts are pale brown to white. The young have a rusty coloured chest. The males' plumage is often lighter due to sun bleaching while foraging: the female remains underground longer, laying and incubating the eggs. Burrowing owls are the only North American owl in which the female is smaller than the male. Burrowing Owls are most often seen perching on the mound outside their burrow.



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Lookalikes:

Habitat Information and Comments

Habitat Comments:

Owls in Saskatchewan are typically found nesting in small patches of heavily grazed pasture land, usually smaller than a quarter section. Ideal burrow sites are in short grass, such as a grazed pasture, surrounded by tall grass, wild plants (forbs) and riparian areas suitable for foraging and hunting as there is little natural food found on cropland. Research has shown that providing extra food can significantly increase the number of owls that survive to fledging, which may suggest that the males are not able to find enough food close to the nest sites. The owl's burrows may have belonged to Richardson's ground squirrels, badgers, black-tailed prairie dogs or foxes. If necessary, Burrowing Owls may enlarge the nest burrow by digging if there is not too much clay in the soil.

Threat Comments:

Communities directly exploited by humans (overgrazing), habitat loss and use of pesticides (Furadan) for grasshopper control. Loss of habitat on the breeding grounds is considered a major factor in the decline of Burrowing Owl populations. In the Regina Plain study area, which extends from Moose Jaw and Regina in the north to Weyburn in the south, over 90 per cent of the land has been converted from native grasslands to crop land and urban development. Even suitable habitat is often surrounded by urban development or crop land which have little natural and adequate food for the owls. Agricultural practices most likely account for this lack of prey. Ground squirrels and other burrowing animals have been actively destroyed as pests. The shortage of burrowing animals also means fewer burrows are available for use by Burrowing Owls as nest sites, roosts and for escape cover.

Roadways also present a danger. As Burrowing Owls tend to fly low when foraging, they may be hit by vehicles. Also, the owls may be hit when foraging for insects living alongside the roads or when scavenging for small mammals killed on the roads.

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Protection Comments:

Determine beneficial management practices and encourage stewardship to enhance the quality of Burrowing Owl habitat and increase owl densities.

Eliminate or reduce destructive land-use practices.

Encourage grazing and agricultural practices that support the needs of Burrowing Owls.

Modify the timing of industrial and other land-use activities that could impact habitats occupied by Burrowing Owls.

Install artificial nest burrows, where feasible.

Enlist farmers, ranchers, and other rural landowners that live within the known range of Burrowing Owls as volunteers in the protection of active, and previously active, nesting areas.

List Burrowing Owls as an 'automatic' species of concern in environmental impact assessments for pipelines, mining, and other industrial activities.

Develop and encourage the implementation of policies and programs that retain or increase the amount of Burrowing Owl habitat.

Conserve native prairie habitat to prevent its conversion to agricultural land.

Landowners can play a major role in the recovery of the Burrowing Owl by adopting the following land management practice, based on recommendations by Operation Burrowing Owl:

Maintain a diversity of grassland conditions, including heavily grazed sites.

Tolerate badgers, ground squirrels and other burrowing mammals on pasture land.

Avoid or exercise caution when using pesticides (a minimum 250 metre buffer zone from active nests is suggested).

Leave ditches and road allowances uncultivated.

Maintain areas of taller grass adjacent to pastures with Burrowing Owls as this provides foraging habitat.

Seed pasture, roadsides and right-of-ways with native seed, which results in more diversity of prey.

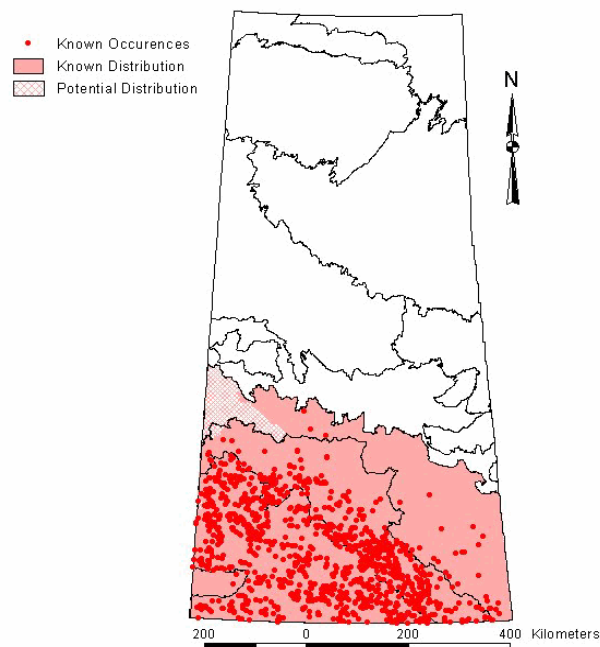
Avoid tree planting near pastures with Burrowing Owls.

Co-ordinate development activity with the absence of the owls.

Consider entering into a voluntary conservation easement agreement with a recognized conservation agency. More information can be found on the Saskatchewan Environment website at:

<http://www.se.gov.sk.ca/ecosystem/conservationeasements.htm>

Saskatchewan Distribution



Rural Municipalities:

ARLINGTON (SK)
ARM RIVER (SK)
AUVERGNE (SK)
BAILDON (SK)
BENGOUGH (SK)
BIG STICK (SK)
BLUCHER (SK)
BONE CREEK (SK)
BRATTS LAKE (SK)
BROCK (SK)
BROKENSHELL (SK)
BROWNING (SK)
CALEDONIA (SK)
CAMBRIA (SK)
CANAN (SK)
CARMICHAEL (SK)
CARON (SK)
CHAPLIN (SK)
CHESTERFIELD (SK)
CLINWORTH (SK)
COALFIELDS (SK)
CORMAN PARK (SK)
COTEAU (SK)
COULEE (SK)
CRAIK (SK)
CYMRI (SK)
DEER FORKS (SK)
DUFFERIN (SK)
EDENWOLD (SK)
ELMSTHORPE (SK)
ENFIELD (SK)
ENNISKILLEN (SK)
ENTERPRISE (SK)
ESTEVAN (SK)
EXCEL (SK)
EXCELSIOR (SK)
EYEBROW (SK)
FERTILE BELT (SK)

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FERTILE VALLEY (SK)
FILLMORE (SK)
FOX VALLEY (SK)
FRANCIS (SK)
FRONTIER (SK)
GLENBAIN (SK)
GLEN MCPHERSON (SK)
GOLDEN WEST (SK)
GRIFFIN (SK)
GRASSY CREEK (SK)
HAPPYLAND (SK)
HARRIS (SK)
HART BUTTE (SK)
HURON (SK)
ITUNA BON ACCORD (SK)
KEY WEST (SK)
KINDERSLEY (SK)
KING GEORGE (SK)
KINGSLEY (SK)
LACADENA (SK)
LAC PELLETIER (SK)
LAIRD (SK)
LAJORD (SK)
LAST MOUNTAIN VALLEY (SK)
LAURIER (SK)
LAWTONIA (SK)
LAKE ALMA (SK)
LAKE JOHNSTON (SK)
LAKE OF THE RIVERS (SK)
LOMOND (SK)
LONE TREE (SK)
LOREBURN (SK)
MANKOTA (SK)
MAPLE BUSH (SK)
MAPLE CREEK (SK)
MARIPOSA (SK)
MARQUIS (SK)
MARRIOT (SK)
MCCRANEY (SK)
MCKILLOP (SK)
MCLEOD (SK)
MILDEN (SK)
MILTON (SK)
MIRY CREEK (SK)
MONET (SK)
MONTMARTRE (SK)
MONTROSE (SK)
MOOSE CREEK (SK)
MOOSE JAW (SK)
MORSE (SK)
MOUNT PLEASANT (SK)
NEWCOMBE (SK)
NORTON (SK)
OAKDALE (SK)
OLD POST (SK)
PENSE (SK)
PIAPOT (SK)
PINTO CREEK (SK)
PLEASANT VALLEY (SK)
POPLAR VALLEY (SK)
PROGRESS (SK)
RECIPROCITY (SK)
REDBURN (SK)
REDBERRY (SK)
RENO (SK)
RIVERSIDE (SK)
RODGERS (SK)
ROSEDALE (SK)
RUDY (SK)

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SARNIA (SK)
 SASKATCHEWAN LANDING (SK)
 SCOTT (SK)
 SHAMROCK (SK)
 SHERWOOD (SK)
 SNIPE LAKE (SK)
 SOURIS VALLEY (SK)
 ST. ANDREWS (SK)
 STONEHENGE (SK)
 SURPRISE VALLEY (SK)
 SUTTON (SK)
 SWIFT CURRENT (SK)
 TECUMSEH (SK)
 TERRELL (SK)
 THE GAP (SK)
 TOUCHWOOD (SK)
 VAL MARIE (SK)
 VANSCOY (SK)
 VICTORY (SK)
 WAVERLEY (SK)
 WAWKEN (SK)
 WEBB (SK)
 WELLINGTON (SK)
 WEYBURN (SK)
 WHEATLANDS (SK)
 WHISKA CREEK (SK)
 WHITE VALLEY (SK)
 WILLOW BUNCH (SK)
 WILLOWDALE (SK)
 WILLNER (SK)
 WINSLOW (SK)
 WOOD RIVER (SK)

Range Extent Comments:

Moderately widespread, throughout Mixed Grassland and Moist-mixed Grassland Ecoregions. Breeding range estimated to be 205910 km², although likely not all occupied currently.

Phenology**Time of Year****Phenology**

Currently no phenology for this species.

Phenology Comments:

Currently no phenology comments for this species.

Reproduction and Ecology Comments**Reproduction Comments:**

Currently no reproduction notes for this species.

Management Needs:

Continue with OBO. Operation Burrowing Owl (OBO) began monitoring Burrowing Owl populations in Saskatchewan. This on-going, voluntary stewardship program, has enlisted over 500 farmers, ranchers and other landowners in the conservation of Burrowing Owl nesting habitat. It has resulted more than 50,000 acres of habitat on private land being voluntarily protected and more than 100,000 acres of public land being protected.

Ensure that Breeding Bird Survey routes encompass areas occupied by Burrowing Owls.

Management Comments:

Currently no management guidelines for this species.

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