

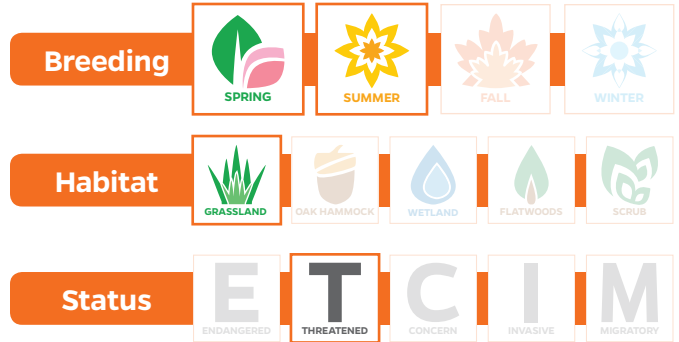


BURROWING OWL

Raoul Boughton · Julie Burford

#001 Rangeland Wildlife Factsheet Series

The Owl “hoo” Loves Rangelands



SCIENTIFIC NAME: *Athene cunicularia floridana*

HABITAT: Open habitats with short groundcover, urban areas

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Smaller owl with long legs, bright yellow eyes and lacking ear tufts

WEIGHT: 6 ounces (0.35 lbs)

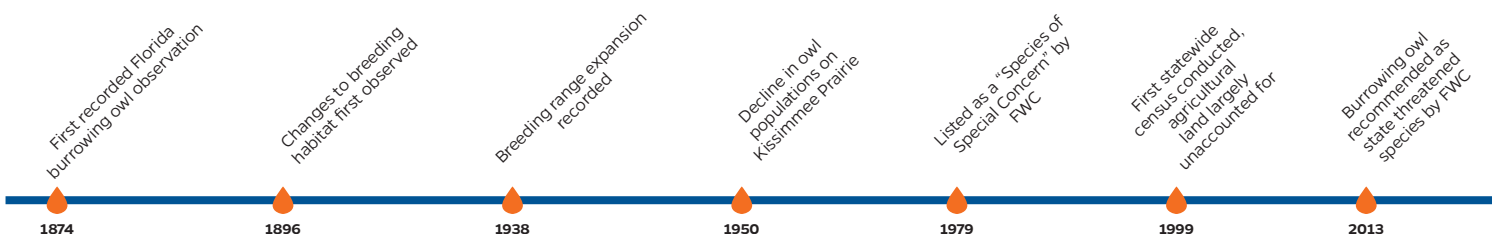
DEMOGRAPHIC RATE: 21-28 day incubation, 6-8 eggs, fledge around 12 weeks



HISTORY AND HABITAT: Owls were originally observed in the late 1800s on dry prairies in south central Florida. The low, grassy vegetation of historic dry prairies was maintained by periodic flooding and natural fires. Today few native dry prairie habitats remain due to fire suppression and conversion to human land uses. Burrowing owls have since expanded their natural breeding range and are now found mostly on agricultural fields, airports, ball fields, and residential lots.

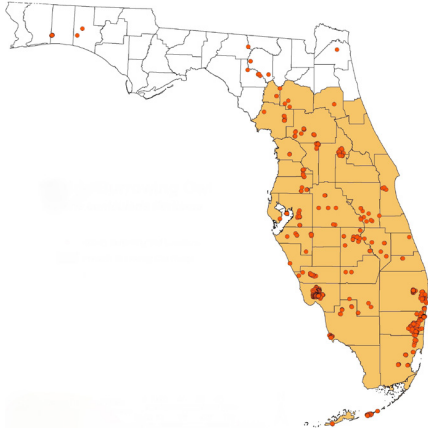
Did You Know?

Burrowing owls often decorate their burrow openings with dung, insect parts, feathers, grass clippings, paper, or other debris.



BURROWING OWL FAST FACTS

- Geographically distinct population in Florida
- Active during day and night
- Can hover in midair to catch food



Courtesy of FWC

DISTRIBUTION: Burrowing owls have expanded their range north and south Florida due to human induced landscape modifications. Their distribution is localized and spotty throughout peninsular Florida, with high concentrations occurring in urban SE coastal areas and Cape Coral. Small colonies have been found as far west as Eglin Air Force Base and as far south as the Dry Tortugas. Little is known about the distribution of burrowing owls on agricultural land, though owls are known to extensively utilize rangeland and other agricultural fields.

BIOLOGY AND BEHAVIOR: Burrowing owls live in single breeding pairs or in colonies consisting of two or more families. During the day, they are usually observed standing at the mouth of their burrow or on a nearby post. Florida burrowing owls typically dig their own burrow, but are also known to use gopher tortoise or armadillo burrows and structures such as manholes, sewer drains, and concrete pipes. Their breeding season is typically between February and July. Young owls emerge from the burrow at 2 weeks and stay with their parents for approximately 12 weeks. Burrowing owls primarily forage on insects, especially grasshoppers and beetles, though small lizards, frogs, snakes, birds, and rodents are also important prey items.

How You Can Help

- Install T perches near owl burrows to give owls elevated view of nest area
- Maintain low vegetation near burrow sites by mowing or trimming weeds
- Avoid heavy equipment near active burrow openings to prevent collapse
- Restrict use of pesticides that may affect owl food sources
- Keep pets away from burrow sites

Types of Burrows



Burrow under limestone outcropping



Burrow on open rangeland



Burrow along fence line



Burrow in abandoned PVC pipe



PHOTO BY RON BIELEFELD

IMPORTANCE OF RANGELAND FOR CONSERVATION: Due to the many threats and decreasing availability of vacant lots in urban areas, rangelands appear to be critical to the burrowing owl's overall conservation. The current status of owls in these areas is unknown, as researchers face difficulty accessing privately owned lands. Limited surveys may also result in population underestimating. Moderately grazed pastures provide the low stature vegetation requirements for owl breeding habitat and may be preferable to more intensively developed areas.

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