

Importance of Prairie Landowners for Burrowing Owls

Burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*) select pastures or other open grass areas for nesting and raising a family. These preferred areas are also excellent farmland and, as a result, most arable land in Canada's Prairie Provinces is privately owned. For this reason, success in conserving burrowing owls and their habitat relies, in part, on the interest of landowners and their informed actions.

Operation Burrowing Owl was initiated to encourage conservation of burrowing owl habitat, and to provide information to producers and the public on factors that may have an adverse effect on these owls. As our knowledge of burrowing owls and their requirements increases, we are able to develop actions people can take to ensure the owl remains a part of our prairie landscape. Once commonly encountered, the Burrowing Owl was listed as threatened in 1979 by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). As numbers continued to decline, it was uplisted to "Endangered" in 1995. In 1999, the burrowing owl was among the first species to be listed as endangered under Saskatchewan's *Wildlife Act, 1997*. We are in danger of losing, within our lifetime, this symbol of a healthy prairie ecosystem.

Rural landowners play a key role in conserving our prairie habitat and maintaining healthy grasslands. Their good stewardship arises because of close ties to the land and from which they derive their livelihood. Operation Burrowing Owl recognizes that the health of the prairie ecosystem depends on the good stewardship shown by landowners across Saskatchewan.

Operation Burrowing Owl offers these benefits to participating landowners:

- Recognition through a personalized gate sign
- Annual newsletter and other educational information
- Non-binding 'handshake' agreement
- Financial support for habitat enhancement activities including seeding perennial pasture
- Helping to maintain a healthy ecosystem with a diversity of species for future generations