

# What is Operation Burrowing Owl?

## The Importance of Prairie Landowners

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 from which they derive their livelihood. We recognize that the health of the prairie ecosystem depends on the good stewardship shown by landowners across Saskatchewan!



## What does OBO do?

- Protects grassland habitat through landowner stewardship
- Promotes habitat enhancement and restoration
- Increases awareness and knowledge of Burrowing Owls and other prairie species at risk
- Monitors Burrowing Owl populations

## What are the benefits?

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

**For more information, please call Operation Burrowing Owl at 1-800-667-HOOT (4668)**

## Thank You to our Supporters!

- Government of Canada—Habitat Stewardship Program
- Government of Saskatchewan—Fish and Wildlife Development Fund
- SaskPower
- Environment Canada—Science Horizons Youth Internship Program
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act
- Government of Canada—Canada Summer Jobs
- Government of Saskatchewan—Student Summer Works Program
- ELSA Wild Animal Appeal of Canada
- TD Friends of the Environment Foundation
- SaskTel
- Nature Saskatchewan member donations

## And A Special Thank You To OBO Landowners and Volunteers

To learn more about **Operation Burrowing Owl** contact:

### Nature Saskatchewan

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**Habitat Conservation Through Landowner Stewardship**

**To Report a Sighting Call the Hoot Line: 1-800-667-HOOT (4668)**

*Nature*  
SASKATCHEWAN

# Operation Burrowing Owl

## Grassland Conservation Through Landowner Stewardship

Nature Saskatchewan's **Operation Burrowing Owl** (OBO) was launched in 1987 to protect Burrowing Owl habitat from cultivation, monitor population changes, and increase awareness of the owl. Landowners voluntarily agree to conserve grassland habitat for Burrowing Owls and other prairie wildlife.

Over 370 private landowners participate in OBO, and together are conserving over 60,000 ha (150,000 acres) of grassland habitat in pastures and other lands while continuing regular land use practices. These landowners annually report the number of owls on their land.

If you are one of the few landowners with Burrowing Owls, or if you have prairie habitat that formerly supported owls, you have an important role in their survival. Every nest site is important to their recovery. Most OBO participants no longer have nesting owls, but their role in conserving habitat is essential if we are to see a population increase of these prairie ambassadors!

### What Do I Do if I Spot a Burrowing Owl?

Call the **Hoot Line: 1-800-667-HOOT (4668)**! By reporting a sighting you are helping to monitor the owl's population. Be sure to also report leg bands, as this provides information about their movements.

### If Burrowing Owls are nesting on your land, become an Operation Burrowing Owl steward!

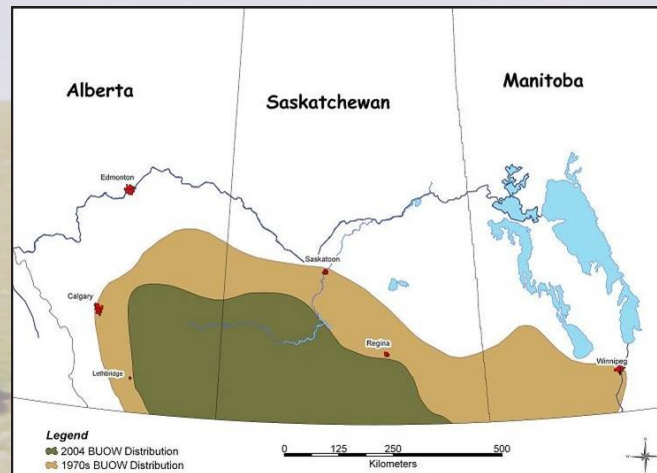
#### Did You Know?

The **American Badger** is a very important prairie species! Badgers **eat many rodent pests** such as ground squirrels and mice and serve as a **burrow provider** for the Burrowing Owl.



## Where are Burrowing Owls Found?

The Burrowing Owl, or ground owl, was once found across the open mixed grasslands and aspen parkland. It ranged from Winnipeg in the east, to Calgary in the west and Prince Albert in the north. It has now disappeared from Manitoba and parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Burrowing Owls are now primarily found in the mixed grassland regions of Alberta and Saskatchewan.



## Know Its Life History!

Burrowing Owls return to Saskatchewan from wintering areas in Texas and Mexico from mid April to mid May. They prefer to nest in grazed pastures, but on occasion will nest in cultivated land, hay fields, or roadside ditches if they find a good burrow.

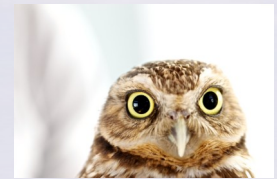
Only 24 cm (9 inches) tall, male Burrowing Owls are often seen standing on mounds of dirt next to their burrows or on nearby fence posts while the females are underground incubating the 6 to 12 eggs.

In late June, young owls begin to explore the area outside their burrows, and congregate around the burrow entrance waiting to be fed by the parents. Young owls often move to nearby burrows when the nest burrow becomes overcrowded.

By August, the young owls have learned to fly and hunt and may move as far as 3 km from the nest area. Migration to Texas and Mexico occurs in September and October.

## How is the Burrowing Owl Faring?

The Burrowing Owl was once a common summer resident of the Canadian prairies. In Canada, it is estimated that population numbers have declined over the past three decades from 3000 pairs to fewer than 800 pairs and only occupy 36% of their historical grassland region.



The owl's decline has been attributed to changes in the prairie landscape. Over 75% of our native grassland has been cultivated, and 40% of our wetlands have been lost. Grassland that remains is often heavily fragmented. Habitat change has resulted in a lower survival rate for Burrowing Owl eggs and young.

#### Did You Know?

Burrowing Owls are a **natural pest control!** They love to eat mice and grasshoppers. **One nest of Burrowing Owls can eat 1,000 or more rodents and many more insects in a single year!**



## Working Together to Help You!

**Education** - Increase your **knowledge** of prairie conservation and species at risk through educational materials including fact sheets, booklets, and workshops.

**Habitat Enhancement** - Expand your pasture! Nature Saskatchewan offers a **native pasture expansion** program to improve habitat for Burrowing Owls and other grassland species. It gives you more pasture and increases habitat for the owls - a **win-win situation** for you and wildlife!

**Conservation Easements** - Leave a conservation legacy! Nature Saskatchewan, working together with partner agencies, offers you this opportunity to **protect the land you love!**

**For more information or to participate in Operation Burrowing Owl, please call 1-800-667-HOOT (4668)**