

Burrowing Owl—continued

Nesting and Incubation

Mating and courtship generally occurs between February and July when a clutch of two to six eggs is laid. However, egg-laying may occur as early as October and as late as May. The eggs are incubated by the female for 28 to 30 days. Each egg is almost round and about the size of a quarter. In rare cases two clutches of eggs are produced in a year.

Young

The young owlets are raised and fed by the female. Males gather and present the female with food for the young. Young owls emerge from the burrow at approximately two weeks of age. At four weeks, they are able to take short flights and can fly well at six weeks of age. Fledging occurs about 42-45 days after hatching. Young birds remain with their parents until they are twelve weeks old. Of several subspecies of Burrowing Owls, the Florida subspecies reproduces the slowest resulting in slower replacement of owls killed or injured within the population.

Food Items

Burrowing owls prey on insects and small vertebrates. Beetles, grasshoppers and crickets are important food items. Other items include crabs, crayfish, frogs, toads, lizards, brown anoles, snakes, rodents and various species of birds. Foraging for prey involves low short flights and, occasionally, momentary hovering. These owls have been seen foraging on road-killed animals and on small migratory birds that have hit building windows or automobiles.



Photo courtesy of Tom Ullman Photography

Species Status

The Florida Burrowing Owl is a "**species of special concern**" established by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. It was assigned this designation in 1979 and is protected under the Commission's rules, Chapter 39 of the Florida Administrative Code. It is also protected under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Florida Burrowing Owls, unlike their western counterparts, are nonmigratory.

Threats

The Burrowing Owl is subject to increased mortality resulting from vehicle collisions, predation by domestic animals, and human harassment. In addition, real estate development pressures have reduced favorable habitat significantly. Man-made burrows are becoming common in urban areas that historically have owls. In several studies involving man-made structures; eggs per nest, and overall hatching success is lower.

What you can DO

Report any sightings to the Brevard County Natural Resources Management Office. Observations should include:

- number of birds
- activity
- date
- locations of possible burrows
- any leg bands seen

Nearest landmarks or roads are very helpful.



Florida Burrowing Owl

BREVARD COUNTY NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT OFFICE



Photograph courtesy of [Tom Ullman Photography](#)

Mission: "To protect the quality of life and promote a sustainable future by managing and conserving the natural resources of Brevard County."

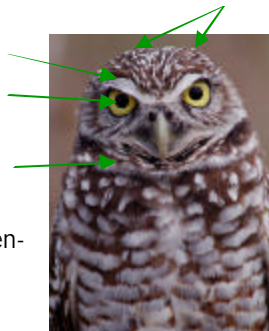
Florida Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia floridana*)

Report any owls you may see in Brevard County!

Identifying Burrowing Owls

The Burrowing Owl is a small owl, measuring approximately nine inches in length (just larger than this brochure) with a wingspread reaching 22 inches across. The owl weighs an average of 150 grams, or about 5 ounces. The Burrowing Owl is the only North American owl species in which males are larger than females. Identifying characteristics are:

- Round head
- Small size (9")
- No ear tufts
- Bill is yellow or greenish-yellow
- Yellow eyes (irises) most common; but chocolate, or olive irises have also been documented.
- Adult plumage is brown with white bars and stripes on the back and beige with brown bars and stripes on the front
- White feathers noticeable:
 - along the brow (eyebrows)
 - under the eyes (moustache)
 - across the throat (collar)
- Legs are long, dark, and unfeathered



Identifiable features include yellow eyes, no ear tufts, and a white throat and moustache. Photo credit, Tom Ullman.

During the breeding season, males appear to be lighter in color than females. The lighter feather color in males may be due to bleaching by the sun while guarding the burrow entrance.

Where to find them

Burrowing Owls, like Caracara, and Bald Eagles, exhibit extremely high nest site fidelity (uses same nest or site).

Any open field with short grass and few trees, such as wet and dry prairie, cemeteries, airports, ball parks, golf courses, open fields, and cleared vacant lots are favorable habitat in Brevard County. Most known burrows are located west of I-95 between the St. Johns River and the interstate.

How you can see them

While most owls are only active at dark (nocturnal), Burrowing Owls are primarily active during daytime hours (diurnal) with some nighttime activity. The best time to observe these owls is dawn-to-10am and from 4pm- to-dusk each day.

- Check fence posts and fencelines for perching birds



Photograph courtesy of Pam Bowen

- Field or cattle pasture-based burrow entrances might have feathers, cow manure, insect parts, small bones, or shiny objects near the mouth
- Owls will be standing guard at burrow entrance
- Culvert and drain pipes are sometimes used for a burrow or roosting
- Urban nesting owls surround burrow opening with pet feces, palm fronds, tin foil, shredded paper, or shells.

Nesting Colonies

Florida Burrowing Owl colonies are loosely organized with burrows located about 30 yards apart. The entrance is circular and is approximately 5.0 inches high and 3.5 inches wide. The tunnel is 6-8 feet in length and may make several turns before rising at an angle into the nest cavity. The nest cavity is 12 to 18 inches in diameter and may be six inches to three feet below the ground. Burrows are used year-round.

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