



BURROWING OWL

Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Genus: *Athene*
Species: *cunicularia*



Range: Open landscapes of N and S America.

Habitat: dry, open areas with low vegetation, agricultural areas, grasslands, rangeland or deserts. Prefers to hunt along the edge of woods

Niche: diurnal, terrestrial, and carnivorous

Wild diet: small mammals such as moles and mice (some birds, amphibians and reptiles) during late spring and early summer and insects the rest of year, especially grasshoppers and beetles.

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 6 - 8 years
(Captivity) 10 years

Sexual dimorphism: sexes of the Burrowing Owl are the same size (Unlike most owls). Female more heavily barred below and male slight lighter

Location in SF Zoo: Children's Zoo – Animal Resource Center

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The Burrowing Owl is one of the smallest owl species. They are ground-dwelling owls with long-legs, a short tail, a flattened facial disc and lacking ear tufts. These owls live underground in burrows that have been dug out by small mammals like ground squirrels and prairie dogs.

The owl revolves its entire head revolves in order to see its surroundings because its yellow eyes are not capable of moving in the eye sockets. Their wings are long and rounded.

Weight: 5.3 oz

Length: 7.5 – 9.8 in.

Wingspan: 21.7 in.

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Not globally threatened although burrowing owls have disappeared from much of their historic range. Their populations are declining in many areas and are listed as endangered or threatened in some states and provinces. Collision with cars is a major source of mortality. Most recent official estimates place them at less than 10,000 breeding pairs.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

Burrowing owls make a tremulous chuckling or chattering call. They also bob their heads to express excitement or distress. Burrowing Owls are very vocal, and have a wide range of different calls.

Burrowing owls often nest in loose colonies about 100 yards apart and spend most of their time on the ground although they may hover above the ground in search for prey. It is diurnal, not nocturnal like most other species of owls and is most active in the morning and evening. It catches more insects during the day and more mammals at night. It hunts by walking, hopping, or running along the ground, or by flying from perch and will catch its food by its talons.

Burrowing owls will nest underground, either by digging its own burrow or more frequently by taking over a burrow dug by other mammals such as prairie dogs and ground squirrels. It will then collect mammal dung and put it in and around its burrow. The dung attracts dung beetles, which the owl then captures and eats.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

The nesting season begins in late March or April. Burrowing Owls are usually monogamous but occasionally a male will have 2 mates. Courtship displays include flashing white markings, cooing, bowing, scratching and nipping. The male performs display flights - rising quickly, hovering for 5 to 10 seconds, then dropping and will present food to the female.

The mother and father will share the responsibility of caring for the young. The female does all the incubating and brooding and the male does all the hunting. The young owlets are altricial and will begin appearing at the burrow's entrance two weeks after hatching and leave the nest to hunt for insects on their own after about 45 days. The chicks can fly well at 6 weeks old. While owlets are still in their nest, they have the capability of mimicking a rattlesnake to scare away predators.

Incubation: 28 – 30 days	Sexual Maturity:
# of eggs: 6 - 9	Fledging: 44 days

MISCELLANEOUS

Sources:

Handbook of Birds of the World Vol 5 © 1999 Lynx Edicions.

<http://www.defenders.org/burrowing-owl/basic-facts>

http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/burrowing_owl/id

<http://www.owlpages.com/owls.php?genus=Athene&species=cunicularia>

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Athene_cunicularia/

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