



# Burrowing Owl

## (*Athene Cunicularia*)

The Burrowing Owl is a small owl, about 8 inches tall with long bare legs, no ear tufts and a small, flat facial disc. The adults are dusty brown with white markings on the belly, chin, “eyebrow,” and throat area. When excited, the Burrowing Owl will repeatedly bow deeply up and down.

### *Habitat & Diet*

Burrowing Owls prefer dry, short grass prairie, and are frequently associated with burrowing mammals, particularly prairie dogs, ground squirrels, and badgers. Often seen by daylight standing on the ground next to a burrow, these burrowing owls favor towns that prairie dogs have abandoned. A prairie dog and an owl may leap together into the same hole to avoid a predator. But these guys are not friends, for burrowing owls eat baby prairie dogs. Burrowing owls also prey on insects, such as crickets, moths and beetles. It will also feed on other arthropods, birds and small mammals, especially mice, ground squirrels, and rats. Burrowing owls breed west of the Mississippi river from southern Canada through Mexico and into South America. A separate subspecies is found in Florida and the Caribbean Islands. Birds from N. America are migratory, although their winter home is unknown.

Height: 8-11 inches  
Weight: 150-160 grams  
Wingspan: 20-24 inches  
Habitat: prairies, semiarid desert plains, other open grasslands  
Range: Southern British Columbia, Western US, and Mexico

### *Fascinating Facts*

The burrowing owl has at least 17 vocalizations, making it one of the most accomplished vocalists of all North American owls. When building a nest, the owl will shred mammalian feces to partially line the chamber. This is believed to camouflage the owls' scent from mammalian predators.



### *Status*

The barred owl depends highly on swamps and wetlands for its food source, and it suffers greatly when these habitats are destroyed. Excessive development in much of the barred owl's range has led to a decline in its population throughout the eastern US. Because of human habitat modification, the Barred Owl is moving west, and hybridizing with the Spotted Owl in the Northwest.