

BURROWING OWL
(*ATHENE CUNICULARIA*)

Navajo/Federal Statuses: NESL G4 / MBTA; not listed under the ESA.

Distribution: Breeding range covers a wide distribution across western North America, generally from south-central Canada and the Dakotas, south through TX, to central Mexico, and west to CA, OR, and WA; a disjunct population occurs in FL and nearby islands. Winter range includes most of TX, and southern parts of NM, AZ, and CA, south through Mexico to northern parts of Central America. Potential range on Navajo Nation includes all low-elevation desertland to elevation of juniper habitats.

Habitat: Nests in ground burrow (often deserted prairie-dog burrow) typically in dry, open grasslands or desertscrub, but grasslands with sparse junipers may also be used on the Navajo Nation; presence of suitable nest burrow is critical requisite.

Similar Species: Size (19-25 cm), coloration, (buffy-white spots on brown body with bright yellow eyes), and life history (diurnal desert-dweller) distinguish this species.

Phenology:

- e.MAR-m.APR: arrival to breeding area, pair formation, nest-site selection
- m.MAR-m.MAY: egg-laying and incubation (28-30 days)
- m.APR- m.AUG: nestling period (~44 days)
- m.JUL-l.AUG: some independence from adult, but little dispersal from natal area
- e.SEP-m.NOV: migration to wintering areas

Survey Method: Follow “Survey Protocol” section of Arizona’s Burrowing Owl Project Clearance Protocol to locate active owl burrows; no provisions for closing unoccupied burrows on Navajo Nation. Survey during hours of first light to 11 am, and 3 hours before sunset to dusk; no surveys during excessive rain or above 32°C (90°F) ambient temperature. Conduct ≥2 diurnal transect surveys (transects spaced 10 m) in suitable habitat with high-powered optics during 15 MAR-31 JUL; record locations of all burrows with sign of recent owl use (presence of muting, pellets, and/or feathers at suitable burrow); scan area for owls every 100 m with binoculars; remove owl sign at potentially active burrows on first visit; check all potentially active burrows for fresh sign on second visit 2-8 days later.

Avoidance: No activity within 0.4 km (¼ mi) of active nest burrow during 1 MAR-15 AUG; no habitat alteration year-round within 0.2 km of nest site.

References:

- Arizona Burrowing Owl Working Group. 2007. Burrowing Owl Project Clearance Protocol, July 30, 2007.
- Haug, E.A., B.A. Millsap, and M.S. Martell. 1993. Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*). In The Birds of North America, No. 61 (A.Poole and F.Gill, eds.). The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, and The American Ornithologists’ Union, Washington, D.C. (description p.2)