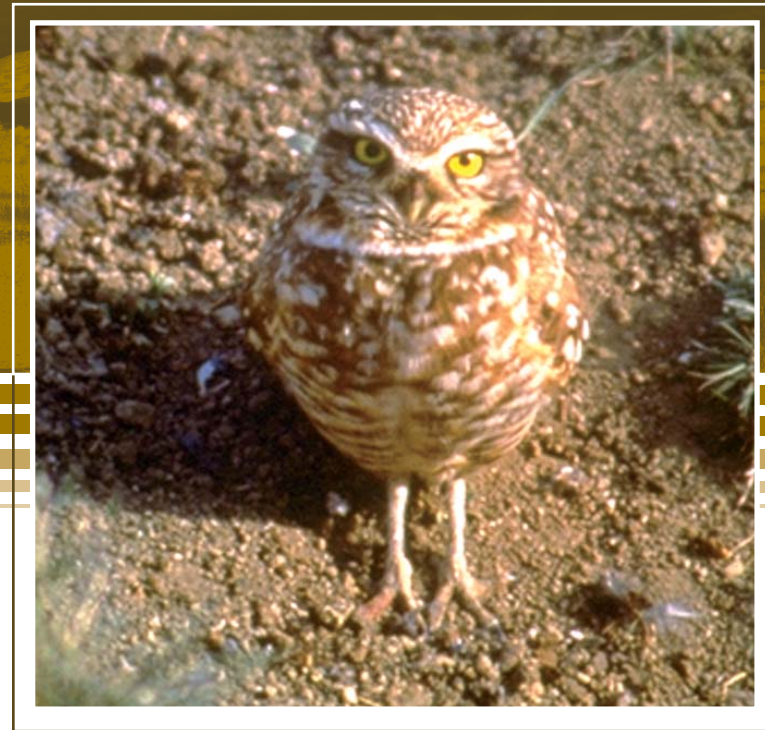


Burrowing Owls Nesting in Your Cropland?

Practical Tips for Land Managers



Most Burrowing Owls choose pastureland for nesting, but on occasion, land managers find them nesting in their cropland. This 'how-to' brochure provides simple steps for land managers to help these rare cropland nests survive.



Interested landowners are encouraged to contact:

OPERATION GRASSLAND COMMUNITY

Alberta Fish and Game Association
6924 – 104 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6H 2L7
Phone: (780) 437-2342
Fax: (780) 438-6872
On-line at: <http://www.afga.org/>

IS THAT A BURROWING OWL NESTING IN MY CROP?

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Burrowing Owls are the only owls in Canada that make their nests underground... they never nest on top of the ground or in trees.

Burrowing Owls prefer to nest underground inside holes dug by badgers, but will also nest in smaller abandoned ground squirrel burrows. Keep a close eye out in any area that has a lot of gopher holes, as you may see owls there too.

If you are out in your crop, and the owls are near their nest:

May - June. You may surprise the owls, and you will likely see one or two of them fly up from either their nest or one of their roost holes (roosts are usually located within 200m of their nest hole).

Late June to Mid-August. You will see several of the young hanging out at the nest burrow or at one or two of the roost burrows, waiting for an adult to bring them food.

If you don't see any owls, there may still be a nest:

You may see that the mound associated with one of your badger holes is covered in owl droppings (white wash), and you may even notice some owl food pellets (the owls cough up these darkish oblong bundles that are composed of indigestible food parts including mouse bones, fur, grasshopper and beetle parts).

If you watch the hole from a distance, you will usually see at least one owl return to the hole, or to a nearby hole, if it is active.

HOW TO HELP THIS NEST (OR ROOST) SURVIVE:

We've had good success helping nests of owls in crop fields when the landowner does a few simple things:

- When using any machinery in the field, leave a 10ft (3 m) berth around the hole.
- If time permits, keep weeds cut/mown around the nest entrance (the owls like to have really short vegetation around their nests, as it enables them to keep a sharp eye out for any approaching predators... that is why they like grazing livestock that 'cut' the grass that surrounds the nest!) If a nest gets overgrown with tall vegetation from one year to the next, owls will usually choose to nest elsewhere.
- Try to avoid use of pesticides. If pesticides must be used, please avoid spraying within 700-800 feet (approx 250 metres) of the nest.

- Disturbance: While the owls are most sensitive to disturbance early in May when they are laying eggs, it's no problem for someone to just walk or drive past the nest. Just be careful not to run over the entrance or it may collapse. The presence of livestock is never a problem.

What to do if you accidentally cultivate over top of a Burrowing Owl Nest Burrow.

Dig open a small hole (~15cm or 6 inches) at the entrance to the tunnel and then call one of the numbers listed below - they can get the message out to the right person. We can then get a biologist out to your place as soon as possible to visit the nest. We may even be able to use an underground camera system (a "peeper") to make sure all of the owls in the nest are still fine.

(NOTE: if you find any above-ground nests in your crop, they are not Burrowing Owl nests, but other birds will still benefit greatly if you can leave an area uncultivated around their nest.)

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Alberta:

Operation Grassland Community,
Alberta Fish & Game Association:
Phone: (780) 437-2342

Saskatchewan:

Operation Burrowing Owl, Nature Saskatchewan:
Phone: 1-800-667-4668 or (306) 780-9833



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