**BASIC FACTS ABOUT BURROWING OWLS**

adapted From the Defenders of Wildlife website: <http://www.defenders.org/burrowing-owl/basic-facts> (6.6)

Burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia*) got their name because they live underground in burrows. Burrows are holes underground. Burrowing owls move into a burrow that has been dug out by small mammals like ground squirrels and prairie dogs. Burrowing owls are covered in brown spotted feathers and have long legs. They also have white “eyebrows” above bright yellow eyes. They are one of the smallest owls in North America.

**Diet**

Burrowing owls eat small mammals during late spring and early summer. Examples are moles and mice. Later they switch to insects, especially grasshoppers and beetles. Burrowing owls also eat birds, amphibians and reptiles.

**Population**

The size of the burrowing owl population is not known. Data suggests they have experienced a big decline. Most recent official estimates place them at less than 10,000 breeding pairs.

**Range**

Where a species lives is called its **range**. Burrowing owls range from the Mississippi to the Pacific and from the Canadian prairie provinces into South America. They are also found in Florida and the Caribbean islands. Burrowing owls have disappeared from much of their historic range.

**Behavior**

Unlike other owls, burrowing owls are active during the day. This is especially true in the spring when they gather food for their large broods. [A brood is a bird’s children.] This species of owl prefers open areas with low ground cover. They can often be found perching near their burrow on fence posts and trees.

Burrowing owls make a chuckling or chattering call. They bob their heads to express excitement or distress.

Burrowing owls often nest in loose colonies about 100 yards apart.

During the nesting season, burrowing owls collect a wide variety of materials to line their nest. They leave some of these materials around the entrance to the burrow. The most common material is mammal dung, usually from cattle. At one time it was incorrectly thought that the dung helped to hide the scent of the juvenile owls. Researchers now believe the dung helps to control the microclimate inside the burrow. It also attracts insects, which the owls may eat.

***Did You Know?***

*When alarmed, young birds will make a hissing call that sounds like a rattlesnake.*

**FAST FACTS**

**Height:** About 10 inches.  
**Weight:** Average is about 6 ounces.  
Unlike most owls in which the female is larger than the male, male and female burrowing owls are the same size.

**Mating Season:** Early spring.  
**Gestation:** 28 days.  
**Clutch size:** 3-12 eggs.  
The young owls 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.

*Defenders of Wildlife has been working to protect our nation's wildlife since 1947.*