

Species Sheets: *Burrowing Owl*

photo by Milo Burcham ©



Common name: Burrowing Owl

Latin Name: *Athene cunicularia*

Field Marks: Length 9 1/2 inches
Wing span 21 inches



Long-legged, ground-dwelling owl. Brown with white spots. Round head with yellow eyes. Juveniles light below and buffy on breast rather than streaked like adults. Considered and a bird of “special concern”, “threatened” and “endangered” in much of range because of loss of habitat, especially with drops in prairie dog populations. May benefit from artificial nests and perches.

Vocalization:

Male’s call is a dove-like “coo-coo”. Also series of chattering “kack” notes.

Nest and eggs:

As name suggests, nests in burrows usually made by other animals such as prairie dog, ground squirrel, marmot, badger. But capable of excavating own burrow, especially in loose soil. Eggs 6-11 with young leaving the burrow at 44 days, returning to roost. May add dried cow dung to nest chamber and entrance, which is very unusual for an owl to add material. Often nest colonially, with up to a dozen pairs in group.

Movement:

Migratory in all of northern range.

Interesting Fact:

Young Burrowing Owls make special sound when they feel their burrow is threatened by predator. Alarm call a “rattling hiss” that sounds just like alarmed prairie rattlesnake. This may scare predators and keep them from entering the burrow. An excellent “mimic” of the dangerous “model”, or rattlesnake.

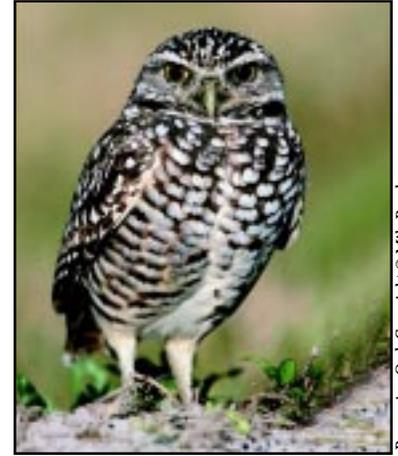
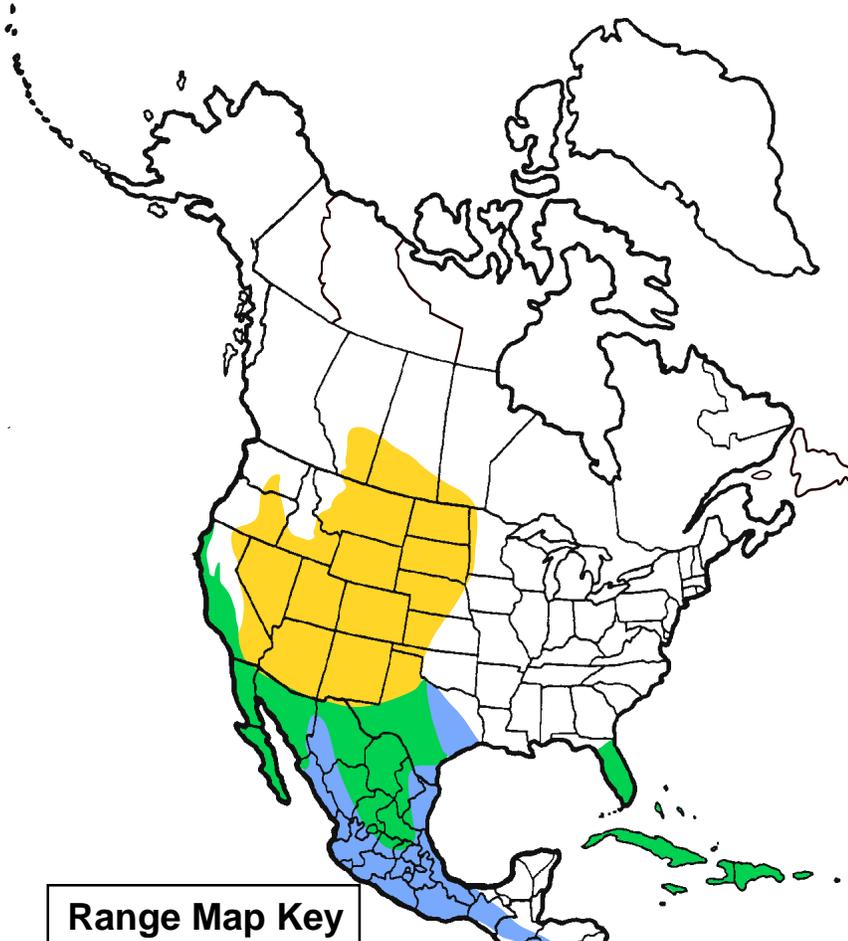
Habitat:

Dry and treeless open country; plains, grassland, prairie, desert. Adapting to human surroundings at times at golf courses, airports, cemeteries, industrial parks, vacant lots.

Behavior:

Preys mostly on insects and small mammals. Prefers grasshoppers, crickets, moths, beetles, plus mice and voles. Also some small birds, and reptiles and amphibians. Mostly crepuscular. Will hunt by running and hopping on ground. Also may hover over vegetation, and catch insects in air. Has a dashing flight from perch. Allopreening and head-bobbing common.

Range Map: Burrowing Owl



Burrowing Owl, Copyright © Milo Burcham



Raptors of the Rockies



Montana Audubon

These maps are designed to show the general limits of occurrence. Within those limits, each species will likely be found only in appropriate habitat.

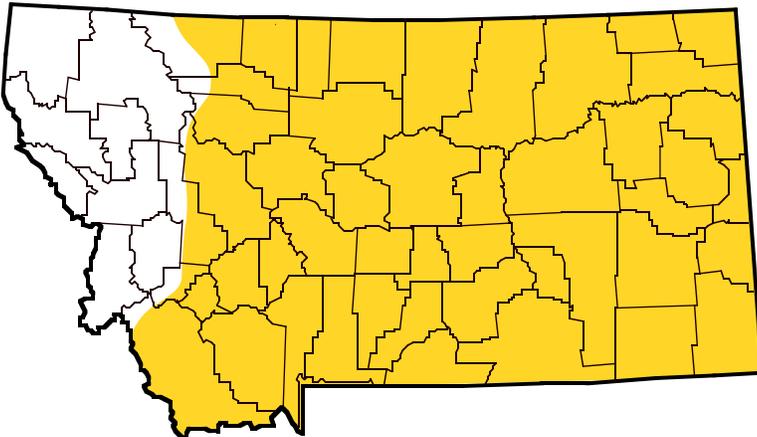
Range Map Key

-  Summer
-  Year-round
-  Winter

scale: 1 inch = 1,000 miles



Raptor Range in Montana



Montana range maps are based on the Montana Bird Distribution data.