



City of Phoenix
OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMS

Western Burrowing Owl

(Athene cunicularia)

The purpose of this flyer is to provide City of Phoenix employees and contractors working on City projects with basic knowledge to reduce the risk of impacting western burrowing owls.

Legal Status:

The western burrowing owl is protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, as amended. All migratory birds and their parts (including eggs, feathers, and nests) are fully protected. They are also protected under Arizona State Law, Title 17-101, Title 17-235, and Title 17-236.

Species Description:

- Small, ground-dwelling owl (mass of approx. 5 oz.)
- Length: 7.6-9.9 inches, with long legs
- Wingspan: approx. 23 inches
- Round head, lacks ear tufts
- Distinct oval facial ruff, framed by a broad, puffy white eyebrow
- Bright yellow iris

Where are they found?

- Dry, open, short grass, treeless plains
- Human dominated landscapes such as:
 - Golf courses, airports
 - Agricultural fields, vacant lots
- Depends on other animals to construct burrows

Identifying an active burrow

- Western burrowing owls use burrows constructed by ground squirrels, badgers, coyotes, tortoises, etc, or may use pipes, culverts, and ditches.
- They may “decorate” the entrance to a burrow with cow, horse, or dog manure, feathers, vegetation, and trash items
- An active burrow may (not always) have owl excrement (“whitewash”) and/or pellets near the entrance

How to avoid impacting western burrowing owls:

- Scan ahead as you work
- ***If western burrowing owls or potentially active burrows observed, STOP WORK and MOVE at least 100 feet away from the owl or occupied burrow before resuming work***
 - Do not harass or “shoo” the owl away
- If the project cannot avoid or stay outside 100 feet of the owl or active burrow, call contact listed below

Questions? Need to work within 100 feet of a western burrowing owl or active burrow? Contact the City of Phoenix Office of Environmental Programs, Environmental Programs Coordinator Tricia Balluff at (602) 534-1775 or tricia.balluff@phoenix.gov.

Sources: Arizona Department of Transportation Environmental Planning Group Western Burrowing Owl Awareness Flyer
Arizona Game and Fish Department Animal Abstract: Western Burrowing Owl. Heritage Data Management System

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