

Endangered Species and Spaces

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4.3 Short-eared Owl: *Asio flammeus* (Pontoppidan)

Order: *Strigiformes*

Family: *Strigidae*

Status

Global Rank: G5

Provincial Rank: S2N, S3B

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



Distinguishing Features:

Medium-sized (crow-sized) buffy white owl. The upper parts are broadly streaked with brown and the abdomen narrowly and more sharply streaked with brown. Ear tufts very short, scarcely discernable. Flight feathers and tail barred with brown. Yellow eyes. Total length 33-43 cm. (Godfrey, 1986).

Distribution

Columbia Basin: In appropriate habitat throughout the Columbia Basin. More common in the south.

British Columbia: Winter populations are concentrated in the lower Fraser River valley, with smaller numbers on southeast Vancouver Island and the southern interior valleys. Breeding is more dispersed, occurring locally in the lower Fraser River valley as far east as Ft. Langley, and in the south and central interior valleys from Creston and the Okanagan Valley as far north as Prince George, possibly into the Peace River (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Global: Breeds in Iceland and across n. Eurasia, south to s. Europe, Afghanistan and Sakhalin; n. North America south to California, Colorado, Missouri, Ohio and Virginia; Patagonia and the mountains of n. South America; Winters in North America throughout most of breeding range; from s. British Columbia, Montana, Ontario and Massachusetts south to c. Mexico. (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Habitat

Open Grassland, grassy or bushy meadows, marshes and bogs. Short-eared Owls nest in open treeless areas such as grasslands, rangelands, dry marshes, farmlands, low-arctic tundra, brushy fields and forest clearings. Winter habitats of the Short-eared Owl are also in open country, including marshes, swamps, lakeshores, spits, sedge-cranberry fields,

sedge-hardhack fields, and grasslands. In British Columbia, coastal grasslands and old-field habitats are the most important (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Threats

Directly threatened by rapid urbanization, industrialization and intensive agriculture in the limited breeding and wintering habitats. Human disturbance of nesting and wintering areas is also a significant problem. Habitat loss and human disturbance have also caused local declines. Intensive grazing around wetlands is a potential of threat at breeding sites. Fragmentation of habitats can also accentuate the magnitude of population fluctuations of their prey (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Biology

Communal roosts of up to 110 birds have been documented in tall-grass fields and on the lee side of dykes in the Fraser River delta. Meadow voles (*Microtus* spp.) dominate the diet, but other mammals (e.g. shrews, moles, rabbits, pocket gophers) and birds are also taken (Cannings et al. In prep.). Migratory Short-eared Owls arrive on the nesting grounds in British Columbia from late March through mid-April. Although clutches have been observed from the end of March to early July, most nesting occurs between late April and early May. Clutch size ranges from 1 to 13, with 6 - 8 eggs being most common. The incubation period lasts approximately 24 days and brood size ranges from 1 to 8 young (5 or 6 being most common). The young leave the nest at 12 - 16 days old and begin to fly at 22 - 28 days old. Fall migration occurs from late October through November (Cannings et al. In prep.).

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