

## FLORIDA BURROWING OWL

*Athene cunicularia floridana*

**Order:** Strigiformes

**Family:** Strigidae

**FNAI Ranks:** G4T3/S3

**U.S. Status:** none

**FL Status:** Threatened



**Description:** Small, ground-dwelling owl with long legs, white chin stripe, round head, and stubby tail. Adults are boldly spotted and barred with brown and white. Juveniles plainer above with less spotting, and buffy below with little or no brown barring. Will often dig their own burrow and, prior to egg laying, will line burrow and entrance with various materials (e.g., grass clumps, palm fronds). After eggs are laid, entrance chamber is further adorned with more decorative and visible objects, such as paper scraps, plastics, tin foil, mirrors, graduation tassels, cigarette butts, and other non-natural materials.

**Similar Species:** Not likely to be confused with other owl species. Differs from western subspecies in having darker upper parts with less buffy brown, and whiter spotting.

**Habitat:** High, sparsely vegetated, sandy ground. Natural habitats include dry prairie and sandhill. Makes extensive use of ruderal areas such as pastures, airports, ball fields, parks, school grounds, university campuses, road right-of-ways, and vacant spaces in residential areas.

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Predominately nonmigratory; maintains home ranges and territories while nesting.

**Florida Distribution:** Largest populations occur in southwest and southeast Florida. Depending on habitat availability, small, patchily distributed populations occur in the Keys and along the interior ridges of Florida from Highlands County to Madison County. A single disjunct population occurs at Eglin Air Force Base in Okaloosa County.

**Range-wide Distribution:** Resident in Florida and the Bahamas.

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**Conservation Status:** Human activities have increased range in Florida but have exposed owls to additional threats. Largest concentrations of owls now reside in ruderal grasslands and lawns of residential and industrial areas. One of the largest populations is in Cape Coral, a large development in Lee County. Intensive cultivation and development of grasslands pose major threats. Permits for legal “take” of burrows also of concern. Human harassment (generally by children), predation by domestic animals, and vehicle collisions take toll on urban/ruderal birds. Predation by fire ants is also implicated in owl mortality.

**Protection and Management:** Maintain optimum condition of natural and ruderal sites where owls occur; will likely require fire in natural areas and mowing in ruderal ones. Studies in Cape Coral showed owls appeared to prefer sites with between 25 and 75 percent of developable lots occupied.

**References:** Bowen 2001, Poole and Gill (eds.) 1993, Robertson and Woolfenden 1992, Rodgers et al. (eds.) 1996, Stevenson and Anderson 1994.



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