

Burrowing Owl Conservation on Golf Courses

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Objectives:

1. Compare burrow occupancy and reproductive success between artificial burrows on and off golf courses.
2. Determine the level of golfer activity that nesting owls will tolerate.
3. Quantify the landscape features surrounding artificial burrows on golf courses that are preferred by nesting owls.
4. Document the proportion of golfers that observe resident owls, the recreational value of their round of golf after breeding owls have occupied artificial burrows, and their interest in observing owls while golfing.
5. Promote artificial burrow installment on golf courses across western North America by producing and distributing a pamphlet explaining the value of installing nesting burrows on their golf course.

Start Date: 2000

Project Duration: 3 years

Total Funding: \$85,300

Burrowing owl populations appear to be declining throughout their range in North America, yet large-scale conservation programs to reverse declines are lacking. Burrowing owls are attracted to golf courses for foraging because they prefer short grass, open areas. Burrowing owls rely on existing burrows in which to nest and limited burrow availability is thought to be one of the main factors contributing to population declines.

Golf courses across the country could play a major role in helping to restore burrowing owl populations if nesting burrows were made available on local golf courses. Our project is a pilot study and involves installing artificial nesting burrows on eight golf courses in eastern Washington. We will expand our project nationally to golf courses around the country if our pilot study demonstrates that burrowing owls can successfully locate and use artificial nesting burrows on golf courses.

The end result will be a publishable pamphlet that can be distributed to superintendents and grounds crews at golf courses around the country instructing them exactly how and where to install successful nesting burrows. The pamphlet will also provide a list of materials needed, cost, and where to purchase the materials.

This year was the second year of our Wildlife Links project and we have installed 130 artificial nesting burrows and added an additional partner golf course (total of 8 partner courses now). We have also installed 86 artificial nesting burrows in areas off golf courses so that we can



Burrowing owls use old animal burrows to nest in on a municipal golf course. The older golfers say owls have nested at this site for more than thirty years.

compare occupancy and reproductive success of artificial burrows on and off golf courses.

We have located 133 natural burrows so that we will be able to compare reproductive success of golf course burrows with natural burrows. This year (2001), owls nested and successfully raised young in two of our artificial burrows on golf courses. Both of these nests successfully fledged young owls. Owls also used four other golf course burrows as alternate burrows.

The fact that owls successfully nested in two of our artificial golf course burrows demonstrates that owls can locate and raise young in artificial burrows placed on golf courses. We anticipate more use of our artificial burrows this coming year (2002) as owls continue to locate our newly-created burrows. In 2002, we plan to continue to monitor our approximately 350 burrows (natural and artificial burrows both on and off golf courses) weekly so we can compare occupancy and reproductive success.

Our project has continued to receive substantial positive media coverage and public interest. The local ABC news affiliate

(KVEW) produced and aired (July, 2001) a 10-minute story on our project. The story featured artificial burrow construction on golf courses, owls using several of our constructed burrows as nests, and the future plans for the project. This media attention credited the U.S. Golf Association and the Wildlife Links program in particular.

Summary Points

- Researchers have installed 130 artificial nesting burrows on our eight partner golf courses in eastern Washington.
- Burrowing owls at six artificial burrows were observed last summer. This gives researchers hope that artificial burrows will be successful for burrowing owl nesting and reproduction.
- This year (2001), owls nested and successfully raised young in 2 of our artificial burrows on golf courses. Both of these nests successfully fledged young owls.
- The local ABC news affiliate (KVEW) produced and aired (July 2001) a 10-minute story on the project.
- The fact that owls nested in two of our artificial golf course burrows demonstrates that owls can locate and raise young in artificial burrows placed on golf courses.