

# WESTERN BURROWING OWLS

*Kiper Blue Ridge Development  
Antioch, CA*

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*"Probably one of the most common birds in California, and known to almost everybody..."*

Current development practices, policies, and eviction procedures have rendered this 1870 quote referring to burrowing owls (from the Geological Survey of California, Ornithology Volume 1, Land Birds, 1870) quite inaccurate in the 21st century.



## Owl Description\*

- The only owls likely to be seen out in the open during daylight.
- Small (8-10 inches tall), with long legs, a short tail, spotted feathers, and yellow eyes and bill.
- Dwell in ground squirrel burrows and rocky outcroppings.
- Hunt insects, rodents, and other small prey.
- Favor grasslands, open fields, and areas with low vegetation.
- Most active during early morning and evening.
- Studies indicate that the Burrowing Owl in Northern and Central California is suffering significant population declines and local extirpations as a result of human development.
- It is listed as a Species of Special Concern by both the State of California and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.
- Fragmentation and loss of wintering and breeding habitat is the main threat to the Burrowing Owl, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area where it has been extirpated from much of its historic range.
- These threats are aggravated by the fact that the owl is especially site-tenacious, preferring to return to breeding and over-wintering grounds year after year.

\*Courtesy of Golden Gate Audubon

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## Blue Ridge Property

- Home to 11 resident burrowing owls (4 breeding pairs and 3 individuals)
- Breeding season 2009: Property habitat for 6 breeding pairs and up to 6 individuals (not including resulting offspring)
- All 6 pairs successfully reared as many as 4 to 8 owlets each.
- Property provides habitat for the ecosystem essential California ground squirrel colony as well as jack rabbits, quail, white-tailed kites, kestrels, red-tailed hawks, coyotes, turkey vultures, etc.
- Approximately 25 acres of semi-developed property slated for 127 homes
- Home construction to commence in Spring 2010

## Eviction Procedure

- Installation of one-way (passive) eviction doors in owl occupied burrows using hand tools. Up to 20 doors installed at any one time and will be operated for two full days at each occupied burrow.
- Owls will be evicted systematically by sections of the project site so that areas can be deemed cleared prior to moving forward with clearing other sections of the site.
- All suitable or occupied burrows will be cleared and once assumed to be vacated by owls will be collapsed and backfilled.
- Upon clearing a contiguous section of the project site, ground squirrel control measures (FUMIGATION) will be implemented in each cleared section.
- Owls must be evicted by February 1, 2010 (start of breeding season)



## The Issue & What We Want

- Blue Ridge Development EIR was approved in Q4 of 1995 and includes zero mitigation for the displacement and eviction of any owls.
- **A supplemental review of the EIR MUST be performed** to take now present owls into account and provide for adequate mitigation and provide actual relocation.

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- **On the conservative side, approximately 71.5 acres of mitigation would be required to bring the City of Antioch's EIR /CEQA documents for biological impact to "less than significant".**
- California Department of Fish & Game's passive relocation plan involves NO relocation. It is simply an EVICTION.
- **Using one way doors so that the owls cannot re-enter their burrows puts them at risk from predation and/or denies them shelter from the weather.**
- The eviction process simply functions by **ASSUMPTION** that displaced owls do fine and is not driven by science or monitoring since evicted birds are not tracked or banded.
- CDFG's policy of evicting owls from their burrows represents "take". This is not habitat conservation.
- Current CDFG eviction practices, rampant development, and lack of habitat have resulted in a decline of burrowing owls throughout the Bay Area.

## A Declining Species

- California's population declined 60% from the 1980s to the early 90's, and continues to decline at roughly 8% per year.
- The Institute for Bird Populations at Point Reyes indicates there has been a 50 percent decline in burrowing owl populations in the Bay Area in the last 10 to 15 years.

## Laws and Regulations\*

*The Western Burrowing Owl is a California State "Species of Special Concern" and is protected under the following laws:*

- The Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, 16 U.S.C. §§ 703-712.
- Fish and Game Code, §§3503, 3503.5, 3513, and 3800.

\*Courtesy of Golden Gate Audubon