

## **THE SASKATCHEWAN BURROWING OWL INTERPRETIVE CENTRE - BACKGROUND**

The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre promotes the conservation of the endangered Burrowing Owl and native prairie habitat through education, eco-tourism, conservation and stewardship.

The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre is dedicated to raising public awareness for the Burrowing Owl endangered species through an interactive interpretive centre, extensive outreach programming and community education fund-raising initiatives. The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre provides a rare opportunity for school groups, tourists and the general public to observe owls in their natural habitat and to learn how they can participate in conservation efforts.

From eco-tourists to dignitaries, local school groups and oversees guests the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre hosts around 5000 visitors each year. The Centre's conservation and stewardship message also extends to include educational outreach programming to almost 10,000 school children each year. With the addition of a new interpretive building the Centre expects both its on-site and extension activities not only to draw a larger audience but also to allow room to work with our fast-expanding clientele.

The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre first opened in 1997 as a partner project between the Moose Jaw Exhibition Company, Saskatchewan Environment and Nature Saskatchewan. With additional financial support from the Western Economic Diversification Fund, an interactive interpretive centre was developed adjacent to an abandoned racetrack surrounding the native habitat of several wild nesting/breeding burrowing owls. The wild owls nesting in the racetrack remain one of the few populations in the area and the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre is perfectly situated to monitor and protect the small owl community as well as facilitate visitors in their observation of these endangered birds.

The Burrowing Owl was listed as an endangered species in Saskatchewan in 1999. While the Saskatchewan Wildlife Act and Wild Species at Risk Regulations protect the Burrowing Owl on private, provincial and federal lands their numbers are still declining over most of their range in western North America. Canada is the northern limit of the Burrowing Owl's range in the Americas. In 1977, 2000 pairs of owls were estimated to breed in Canada. By 1995 the Canadian population had dropped by half with an estimated rate of decline between 20 to 22 percent per year. About half the remaining Canadian population nests in Saskatchewan. From 1987 to 2000, Saskatchewan research showed a Burrowing Owl decline from 78 breeding pairs to 68 individuals in the Regina Plains study area. Studies in 2001, showed only 5 percent of young owls and only one out of every three owls return to the Regina Plains area each spring with a high mortality rate being a key factor.

In the late 1980's Operation Burrowing Owl began monitoring owl populations in Saskatchewan after significant declines were first reported. By the mid 1990's, initiatives had begun to track factors adversely affecting Burrowing Owl populations. A Canadian national recovery plan for the Burrowing Owl began in 1995 with the goal to increase populations to self-sustaining levels removed from the endangered species list. By 1997 the Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre was created to protect one of the few annual owl-nesting habitats.

The Centre is open to the general public and can be booked for private tours. The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre is a non-profit organization and does not charge an entry or program fee. The Saskatchewan Burrowing Owl Interpretive Centre accepts donations.

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