

Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

FIELD MARKS: Round-headed, eyebrows white, eyes yellow, and bill yellow/white or yellow/black. The head is spotted. Facial disk less distinct than in other owls. Ventrally, brown horizontal bars from neck to belly. Legs are long and very sparsely feathered. Dorsally, the brown back is spotted with white. Juveniles are similar to adults, except the head is plain brown, the upper chest has a dark tan band, and the lower chest and belly are whitish. **SIZE:** nine to 10 inches. **WEIGHT:** five to six ounces. **SIMILAR SPECIES:** Short-eared owls are larger, have a black bill, and have mothlike flight. **HABITAT:** Rangelands and prairie. **VOICE:** "Coo-cooo, coo-cooo...", given approximately two

seconds apart. **NATURAL HISTORY:** Begins nesting in April. Nests in burrows made by prairie dogs, badgers, and other medium to large fossorial (digging or burrowing) animals. Also, burrowing owls are capable of doing some digging themselves. Clutch size seven to 10. Incubation approximately 28 days. Young fledge at 40 to 45 days. Migrates to warmer climates in southwestern United States during October and beginning in March, returns to Montana. **FOOD HABITS:** Grasshoppers, beetles, other ground insects, and small mammals. **STATUS:** Listed as a species of special concern by the Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. Limited by conversion of rangelands to croplands. May have been affected by mammal poisoning programs. Because of habitat loss, the intermountain valley populations in western Montana are almost gone.

