



Golden Gate Audubon Society  
**Cesar Chavez Park Burrowing Owl Program,  
Berkeley, California**  
2011-2012 Summary Report

## Overview

The Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*) was once a common resident of the San Francisco Bay Area. Today, it is a California Species of Special Concern, having been extirpated from much of its former habitat throughout the State, including the Bay Area. Currently, the only remaining breeding Burrowing Owls in the Bay Area reside in the Mountain View Shoreline Park in the South Bay.

For several years, Burrowing Owls have overwintered in the East Shore State Park and Cesar Chavez Park in Berkeley, CA. In 2008, the den of one of the owls was dug up by an off-leash dog and the owl disappeared. Concerned that disturbances would result in the extirpation of the owls from Cesar Chavez Park, Golden Gate Audubon volunteers worked with the City of Berkeley to erect a temporary fence along the northeast portion of the park, which GGAS refers to as a Wildlife Protection Area (WPA). Subsequently, with input from GGAS volunteers, the City of Berkeley commissioned and constructed an art project that included a stylized fence that separates the WPA from the walkway. Volunteers also organized visits to the park to record observations of the owls and provide educational materials and other information to park visitors.

## 2011-2012 Program

For the fourth year in a row, Golden Gate Audubon volunteers coordinated with the City of Berkeley's Shorebird Nature Center at the Berkeley Marina to recruit more volunteers and arrange a work day and docent training seminar. The volunteers were provided with training for interacting with the public and recording data, data forms, and online resources for data entry, communication and scheduling. Docents set their own schedule for visiting the park. Visits generally lasted approximately 1 hour.

The Golden Gate Audubon Society's Burrowing Owl Docent Program would not exist without the dedicated work of its volunteer coordinators, Della Dash and Frances Dupont, and the many volunteers that monitor the owls, record their observations, and interact with the public.

### The 2011-2012 Docents were:

Bei Brown	Eleanor Stark	Kathy McCarter
Betty Ishida	Frances Dupont	Liz Williams
Carolyn Kolka	Joan Collignon	Riesha Riemer
Doug Donaldson	Mary Malec	Roz Hardy
Della Dash	Karen Smith	Alan Hirsch

## Results to Date

During the 2011-2012 Burrowing Owl overwintering season at Cesar Chavez Park, **12 docents visited the park at least 131 times, conducting observations for a total of approximately 124.9 observation-hours.** During those visits, docents recorded the location of **as many as 5 Burrowing Owls** in the Park at the same time. The CCP population ranged from 1 to 5 owls during the course of the winter season (starting in late October, peaking in late December, and ending in late March). Docents also counted park visitors, dogs (both on- and off-leash), and persons that stopped to express an interest in the owls.

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### **Burrowing Owl Observations**

Highlights of the Burrowing Owl observations include:

- 10/23/10 – first sighting of an owl at CCP for the season
- 10/23/10 – first sighting of up to two burrowing owls at CCP
- 11/16/11 – first sighting of up to three burrowing owls at CCP
- 12/2/11 – first sighting of up to 4 burrowing owls at CCP
- 12/18/11 – first sighting of up to 5 burrowing owls at CCP
- 2/5/12 – last sight of up to 4 burrowing owls at CCP
- 3/21/12 – last sighting of a burrowing owl at CCP for the season

### **Park Visitors**

The monitoring protocol asked observers to record all park visitors that pass by the observation area during the survey. **During the survey, observers recorded a total of 4932 people, or an average of approximately 41 people per survey hours** (an increase from 35 people/survey hour documented during the 2010-2011 season). Popular activities at the park include walking, biking, and dog-walking, but observers were not asked to distinguish between different activities.

### **Interactions with Park Visitors**

**During the park visits, the docents interacted with at least 1169 people, approximately 10 people per survey hour** (consistent with the number of interactions during the 2010-2011 season). Visitors stopped to express an interest in the owls. The average provided is somewhat misleading, as it reflects occasional large groups that would stop and talk with the docents. According to notes recorded by the docents, many of the visitors asked questions about the owls and the art installation/fence. Many used the spotting scope or binoculars provided by the docents to get a better view of the owls. Almost unanimously, those that expressed an interest in the owls were in support of the fence around the Wildlife Protection Area.

### **Dog Activities in Cesar Chavez Park**

The monitoring protocol asked observers to count all dogs observed during the survey period and to record whether the dog was leashed or unleashed and whether it was outside or within the WPA. Observers recorded a total of 646 dogs on leash during all surveys, an average of approximately 5.7 dogs on leash per survey hours (an increase from 564 total dogs and 4.7 dogs on leash per survey hour in 2010-2011).

Observers recorded a total of 130 dogs off-leash during all of the surveys, an average of approximately 1 off-leash dog per hour (consistent with the 2010-2011 and 2009-2010 seasons). Observers took notes and recorded disturbances to the owls as a result of off-leash dogs and actions of owners (if any). Observers also often asked people to leash their dogs.

### **Next Steps**

The Burrowing Owl docent program will continue during the 2012-2013 season at Cesar Chavez Park and the adjacent Berkeley Meadows. Other GGAS volunteers are monitoring owls wintering at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland, California and are checking for possible owls at the Albany Plateau and along the Richmond Shoreline.

For more information, please contact Mike Lynes, Conservation Director, at (510) 843-6551 or [mlynes@goldengateaudubon.org](mailto:mlynes@goldengateaudubon.org)