



Golden Gate Audubon Society

Cesar Chavez Park Burrowing Owl Program, Berkeley, California

2012-2013 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.

2012-2013 Program

For the fifth 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 2012-2013 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 2012-2013 Burrowing Owl overwintering season at Cesar Chavez Park, **12 docents visited the park on at least 75 days from the months of October 2012 to March 2013, conducting observations for a total of approximately 102 observation-hours.** During those visits, docents recorded the location of **as many as 3 Burrowing Owls** in the Park at the same time. Owls were also observed adjacent to the Tom Bates Sports Complex. The CCP population ranged from 1 to 3 owls during the course of the winter season (first sighting on October 26, 2012 and the last recorded observation on March 19, 2013). Docents also counted park visitors, dogs (both on- and off-leash), and persons that stopped to express an interest in the owls.

GOLDEN GATE AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Summary Report of 2011-2012 Cesar Chavez Park Burrowing Owl Program

Burrowing Owl Observations

Highlights of the Burrowing Owl observations include:

- 10/26/12 – first sighting of an owl at CCP for the season (last year: 10/23/11)
- 11/21/12 – first sighting of up to two burrowing owls at CCP (last year: 10/23/11)
- 12/5/13 – first sighting of up to three burrowing owls at CCP (last year: 11/16/11)
- 3/19/13 – 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 3717 people, or an average of approximately 4932 people, or an average of approximately 36 people per survey hours** (a decrease from 41 people per hour in 2011-2012, but close to 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 1551, approximately 15 people per survey hour (an increase over the total of 1169 people, approximately 10 people per survey hour in the 2011-2012 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.

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 464 dogs on leash during all surveys, an average of approximately 4.5 dogs on leash per survey hours (a decrease from 5.1 dogs/survey hour in 2011-2012, but consistent with 4.7 dogs/survey hour in 2010-2011).

Observers recorded a total of 155 dogs off-leash during all of the surveys, an average of approximately 1.5 off-leash dog per hour (an increase from 130 dogs total and approximately 1 dog per survey hour in the 2011-2012 season) 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 2013-2014 season at Cesar Chavez Park and the adjacent Berkeley Meadows and the area near the Tom Bates Sports Complex Fields. 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, Executive Director, at (510) 843-9912 or mlynes@goldengateaudubon.org