



# Golden Gate Audubon Society Cesar Chavez Park Burrowing Owl Program, Berkeley, California 2013-2014 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 few documented remaining breeding Burrowing Owls in the Bay Area reside in the Mountain View Shoreline Park and at the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge in Fremont.

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.

## 2013-2014 Program

For the sixth 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 twenty one volunteers that monitor the owls, record their observations, and interact with the public.

### The 2013-2014 Docents were:

Mimi Abers	Frances Dupont	Ben McClinton
Linda Agerter	Christine Ford	Leyll Nesbitt
Raunak Bhinge	Mary Gerber	Karen Rosenbaum
Staci Collins	Susan Greef	Reisha Riemer
Della Dash	Lisa Hern	Karen Smith
Ronnie Davis	Shayna Kramb	Elizabeth Williams
Doug Donaldson	Mary Malec	Carolyn Weil

## Results to Date

During the 2013-2014 Burrowing Owl overwintering season at Cesar Chavez Park, **21 docents visited the park on 105 days from October 2013 to March 2014, conducting observations for a total of approximately 178 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 September 29, 2013 and the last recorded observation on March 21, 2014). Docents also

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counted park visitors, dogs (both on- and off-leash), and persons that stopped to express an interest in the owls.

### **Burrowing Owl Observations**

Highlights of the Burrowing Owl observations include:

- 9/29/13 – first sighting of an owl at CCP for the season (last year: 10/26/12)
- 11/1/13– first sighting of up to two burrowing owls at CCP (last year: 11/21/12)
- 12/2/14 – first sighting of up to three burrowing owls at CCP (last year: 12/5/12)
- 3/21/14 – 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 4,773 people, or an average of approximately 26 people per survey hour** (a decrease from 36 people per hour in 2012-2013, 41 people per survey hour in 2012-2013, and 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 2,788 people, approximately 15 people per survey hour** (1,551 or 15 per survey hour in 2012-2013, 1,169 people, and approximately 10 people per survey hour in the 2011-2012 seasons). 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 723 dogs on leash during all surveys, an average of approximately 4 dogs on leash per survey hours (4.5 on leash in 2012-2013, 5.1 dogs/survey hour in 2011-2012, but consistent with 4.7 dogs/survey hour in 2010-2011).

Observers recorded a total of 175 dogs off-leash during all of the surveys, an average of approximately 1 off-leash dog per hour (an 155 or 1.5 dogs off-leash in 2012-2013; and 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**

Burrowing Owl docent program will continue during the 2014-2015 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 in San Francisco and at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Regional Shoreline in Oakland, CA and are checking for possible owls at the Albany Plateau and along the Richmond Shoreline.

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