



Golden Gate Audubon Society

Cesar Chavez Park Burrowing Owl Program, Berkeley, California

2014-2015 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, the City of Berkeley received a large donation and with input from GGAS volunteers, commissioned and constructed a public art project that included a stylized fence that separates the WPA from the walkway. Volunteer docents also organized visits to the park to record observations of the owls and provide educational materials and other information to park visitors.

2014-2015 Program

For the eighth year in a row, Golden Gate Audubon volunteers coordinated with the City of Berkeley's Shorebird Nature Center at the Berkeley Marina to recruit and train docents during an annual training seminar. The docents were provided with educational material to assist them with public education and data collection. Materials included information and photo cards of burrowing owls and their habitat, feeding habits, migration and breeding patterns, and natural history. Additional materials included data forms and online resources for data entry, communication and scheduling. Docents set their own schedule for visiting the park 2-3 times monthly. 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, Frances Dupont and Lisa Hern, along with the many volunteers that monitor the owls, record their observations, and provide public education.

The 2014-2015 Docents were:

Della Dash	Lisa Hern
Doug Donaldson	Ruth Kilchin
Frances Dupont	Ben McClinton
Susan Greef	Karen Rosenbaum
Jane Hart	Reisha Riemer

Results to Date

During the 2014-2015 Burrowing Owl overwintering season at Cesar Chavez Park, **8 docents visited the park on at least 45 days from the months of September 2014 to March 2015, conducting observations for a total of approximately 59 observation-hours.** During those visits, docents recorded the location of one **Burrowing Owl** in the Park. During this past season, owls were not observed adjacent to the Tom Bates Sports Complex. The CCP population was of 1 owl during the course of the winter season (first sighting on October 13, 2014 and the last recorded observation on February 2, 2015).

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

Burrowing Owl Observations

Cesar Chavez Park:

Highlights of the Burrowing Owl observations include:

- 10/23/14 – first sighting of an owl at CCP for the season (last year: 10/26/13)
- There were no sightings multiple burrowing owls at CCP (last year: 11/21/13)
- 12/23/14– last sighting of a burrowing owl at CCP for the season

Albany-Berkeley Location (New in 2014-2015):

- 10/13/14 – first sighting of and owl at the Albany-Berkeley location
- No sightings of two or more burrowing owls documented by docents previously
- 2/21/15- last sighting of a burrowing owl at the Albany-Berkeley location for the season

San Francisco Location (New in 2014-2015):

- 10/19/14 – first sighting of an owl at the San Francisco location for the season
- No sightings of multiple burrowing owls reported in previous years by docents
- 2/21/15- last sighting of a burrowing owl 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 1,412 people, or an average of or an average of approximately 24 people per survey hours.** The two East Bay locations combined for an average of 35 people per hour and the San Francisco location had an average of 8 people per hour.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Park Visitors/Survey Hour (rounded)</u>
2014-2015	24* *Note: 3 locations for 2014-2015
2013-2014	26
2012-2013	36
2011-2012	41
2010-2011	35

Popular activities at the park include walking, biking, and dog-walking, but observers were not asked to distinguish between different activities. In the 2014-2015 season, almost 60% of the observation hours were spent at the two East Bay locations and the remaining 40% of the observers hours occurred at the San Francisco location.

Interaction with Park Visitors

During the park visits, the docents interacted with at least 288 people, approximately 5 people per survey hour. Observers at the two East Bay locations combined for an average of 7.7 people per survey hour and the observers at the San Francisco location had 1 interaction per hour.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Park Interactions</u>	<u>Per Survey Hour</u>
2014-2015*	288	5 *Note: 3 locations
2013-2014	2,788	15
2012-2013	1,551	15
2011-2012	1,169	10

The decrease in the number of park interactions this season was due to the report of fewer owls this year and fewer docents who performed the surveys. The docents were also not present when large groups were on site as in previous years. At the East Bay locations this season, observers talked to 22% of the park visitors on average while observers in San Francisco talked with 11% of the park visitors. Park visitors stopped to express an interest in the owls. Many used the spotting scope or binoculars provided by the docents to get a better view of the owls.

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Dog Activities

Observers counted all dogs observed during the survey period recorded whether the dog was leashed or unleashed and whether it was outside or inside the Wildlife Protected Area. This season observers recorded a total of 197 dogs on leash during all surveys, an average of approximately 3.4 dogs on leash per survey hour. More than 80% of the dogs at the two East Bay locations were on leash and only 7% were on leash at the new, more remote San Francisco location.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Average Dogs on Leash/Survey Hour</u>	
2014-2015*	3.4	Note*: 3 locations
2013-2014	4.0	
2012-2013	4.5	
2011-2010	5.1	
2010-2011	4.7	

Observers recorded a total of 204 dogs off leash during all of the surveys, an average of approximately 3.5 off leash dogs per hour, a 2.5 off leash dog per survey hour average increase from the prior year. The increase from last season reflects 93% of off leash dogs recorded at the San Francisco location.

<u>Season</u>	<u>Off Leash Dogs</u>	<u>Average Dogs Off Leash/Survey Hour</u>
2014-2015*	204	3.5 * Note: 3 locations
2013-2014	175	1.0
2012-2013	155	1.5
2011-2012	130	1.0

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 2015-2016 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 and along Ocean Beach in San Francisco, California. They are also monitoring the Albany Plateau and the Richmond Shoreline for additional migratory burrowing owl populations.

For more information, please contact Noreen Weeden, Conservation Project Manager, at (510) 301-0570 or nweeden@goldengateaudubon.org