

Burrowing Owl: Burrow Identification



Like the San Joaquin Kit Fox, Burrowing Owls use abandoned rodent burrows for roosting and nesting cover. In areas where the soil is soft they may dig their own burrows. If burrows are scarce, they may also nest in pipes, culverts or nest boxes. Although Burrowing Owls prefer

burrows located in flat, bare terrain, in areas adjacent to agriculture and waterways they often use burrows located on levees, berms, and other earthen structures (see above photo).

Active Burrowing Owl nests (burrows) can be identified by the presence of excrement (whitewash) and prey pellets at their entrance (see back).

Although Burrowing Owls are active day and night, sometimes they are not as visible. If this is the case, a “suspected” active burrow can also be identified by closely observing it early in the evening, when owls come out to roost or hunt.



Photos: Rosalie Faubion (USBR)



California Department of Pesticide Regulation
Endangered Species Project

Burrowing Owl: other signs of presence



Insect remains

Rodent remains

In addition to excrement (whitewash) near the entrance of burrows, sometimes pellets or castings may be found. These pellets are habitually regurgitated by owls and other birds. At first glance they look similar to the scats of certain carnivores. Closer inspection shows a dry, compact casting, containing purely feathers, fur and bones.

Burrowing Owls often use fence posts and other structures as perches for roosting or hunting. These perches are typically covered with whitewash, and may also have several prey pellets at their base.