



Legal and ethical protections for wildlife species like the Burrowing Owl are intended to minimize potentially negative impacts by humans.

According to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission:

- The Burrowing Owl is protected by the U.S. Migratory Bird Treaty Act and as a State Species of Special Concern by Florida's Endangered and Threatened Species Rule.
- Intentionally feeding species listed as threatened, endangered, or of special concern is prohibited ... because it can negatively alter feeding behavior in some species and can cause them to become accustomed to people.

According to the American Birding Association Principles of Birding Ethics:

- To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming.
- Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas, or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, or of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area.
- Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover.
- Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

HEARTWARMING REUNION

A Burrowing Owl Recovers from a Wing Injury and Rejoins the Parliament

A sadly too-common wing fracture injury brought another local Burrowing Owl to SFWC's clinic. The patient required veterinary medical treatment and about a month's worth of rehabilitation.

Birds with wing injuries like this are regularly seen at the SFWC's wildlife hospital, with vehicle strikes being one of the most common causes.

Although the owl was eating, she could not fly well. But SFWC's expert veterinarians were able to stabilize the fracture so that the owl's injury could heal and she could take proper flight again.

When ready, the owl was released very near where she was originally found. The site has several active burrows and a healthy population of this important species.

Initially, she kept her distance from the burrow, making some tentative steps toward the other birds there. A male owl came to the mouth of the burrow's opening to watch her as she stayed in the shade of a nearby tree.

After about an hour, she finally made a connection with the group, getting close enough to nuzzle faces with another bird.

"She was greeted by a male owl we presume was her mate, and then seemingly rejoined the parliament," says Shelby Proie, SFWC Release Specialist.

On hand to help SFWC personnel releasing the owl back to nature was Liza Morffiz of Project Perch, part of the South Florida Audubon Society in Broward County.

"SFWC staff were very caring and very knowledgeable. They did a great job," Liza says. "It was just amazing."

We think Liza's photographs are amazing, and we are grateful to her for allowing us to share them. She points out the legal and ethical obligations of photographers like herself (see sidebar).

"People have to be aware, and we have to educate," Liza says.

She continues to regularly document observations at the burrow, as one of several sites that Project Perch monitors. And SFWC continues to help other Burrowing Owls, a species regularly seen as patients at the wildlife hospital.

DID YOU KNOW?

A group of owls is called a "parliament." Burrowing Owls can be active during both day and night. They live in ground burrows that were once the residences of skunks, tortoises, or armadillos. As with most of the wildlife in South Florida, vehicle strikes and loss of habitat to human development are threats to Burrowing Owls.

