

CALIFORNIA BURROWING OWL CONSORTIUM
MEETING MINUTES
February 4, 2006

Meeting Chairperson: Christine Gaber

OLD BUSINESS

1. Alameda Co. Windfarm Action

Tom Roberts, Environmental. Science, Assoc., S.F.
Alameda Co. Windfarm substantial mortality at Alameda Co. Wind Resource Area.
Golden Gate Audubon Society sued, no CEQA evaluation.

CEC urged Alameda Co. supervisors to adopt recommendations.
Alameda Co. created a working committee group, with GG Audubon, wind power cos. &
Ctr. Biol. Diversity. Tried to reach compromise.

Appellates were asking for immediate reduction of avian mortality by half. County's
recommendations only top two tiers of turbines, and phasing out turbines over 5 yrs.

Scientific review committee, mortality data will be collected over next few months.

PG&E doesn't have any wind farms in the area.

Ctr. For Biological Diversity returning to court on 2/6/06/

Ongoing drama, stay tuned.

100 – 300 BUOW killed annually at Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area. Smallwood
Report. Available on CEC web site.

Wind turbine shutdowns are proposed for Nov. to Feb. Occurrence of BUOW mortality is
greatest in the fall.

2. Cal. BUOW Proceedings Update, Jack Barclay

Initial commitments for 24 papers, has received 19 draft papers so far. 10 papers are in
final draft.

Fish & Game is preparing a BUOW Conservation Plan for CA, which may be included in
the proceedings.

Reprints of two previously published papers will also be included:

Fish & Wildlife Service CA Assessment

BUOW status in the Imperial Valley

Plans are for the Inst. Bird Populations to publish the proceedings as a stand-alone
volume of their journal.

3. Statewide BUOW Survey Plans, Bob Wilkerson, Institute for Bird Populations

2 year survey of breeding birds, received grant from National Fish & Wildlife Foundation
Will repeat similar survey completed in the early 90s.

Citizen science survey, field biologists used in desert and where volunteers can't be recruited.

Early 90s survey

Sampled areas below 1,800 feet. Range of 5 x 5 km blocks in 11 survey regions.

Partnered with Audubon Society chapters and other groups to recruit volunteers

704 blocks had breeding pairs out of about 5,000 blocks. 9,266 breeding pairs estimated.

Bay Area Interior 165 breeding pairs. Imperial Valley has more than 70% of state's owls.

Steve Simmons, Hhrn flies, important to educate cattlemen,

Pesticides, ivermectin old one (for round worms, mites) kills dung beetles

Cysectin, new pesticide, doesn't kill beetles, which manage the dung and kill flies. Very important for food chain.

California Rangeland Trust would be interested in this info.

Current survey

Where reintroduction might be successful

Include three new regions in current survey, Great Basin and desert areas and those with sparse human population. Mojave Desert, Northeastern CA. Importance of these regions to total population?

Which regions need conservation efforts most? Region 5 is likely. Human development.

Breeding Bird Survey is inadequate for this assessment. Opponents of the BUOW Petition cited the BBS. Burrowing owl trends in the BBS are driven by just three routes in the Imperial Valley. Only a small part of the state accounted for the increase in BUOW population.

Other researchers have found BBS data suggest declines in southern Sacramento and San Joaquin Valley.

How you can help:

Inform IBP where breeding owls are.

Coordinate volunteers - Organize surveys, coordinators will receive survey packs, IBP training sessions.

Volunteer to survey

Bob Wilkerson, 415-663-2051

bwilkerson@birdpop.org, www.birdpop.org

NEW BUSINESS

1. BUOW Conservation Banks, Julia Staley (absent)

2. Consortium Mission Statement, Jack Barclay

BUOW Consortium is independent to maintain credibility.

To assist agencies, communities, local governmenta to implement conservation strategies.

Barclay discussed mission with people present. Web page?

Huge leap in time commitment to provide information to general public. One tool to understanding BUOW conservation. Will send recommended mission statement via email, will vote next meeting.

3. Merced County Artificial Burrow Project, Steve Simmons

Three ranches for his BUOW project, 30,000 acres total

West of Los Banos

One north of refuge

East side of valley

Simmons showed nest box he has designed. Two ranch properties belong to a friend and third is managed by another friend.

Questions:

How far do owls disperse?

How well do they survive when they disperse?

How often do pairs return to same nest?

BUOW band recovery rate is 2%

4. Farallon National Wildlife Refuge, BUOW Relocation Report/House Mouse Eradication, Joelle Buffa

Manager of Farallon NWR, founded in 1909

30% of CA sea birds nest there.

Southeast Farallon Island, past human activity introduced non-native animals and plants. Goal is to remove non-natives & restore natural processes.

Ashy storm-petrels are long-lived (35 yrs), altricial chicks, nocturnal to avoid gulls, 50% of world's population breeds on the Farallons. 40% decline in 20 yrs, predation from western gulls and burrowing owls. House mouse suspected of preying on eggs or chicks (weak evidence).

House mice eat invertebrates, plants, seeds, some bird eggs & chicks.

BUOW do not breed on Farallons but are regular fall migrant. Most stay a few days and move on. All BUOW have been hatching year birds. A few owls (2 to 4) winter over.

In fall, mouse population is highest. Limited food sources for owls. In late winter/early spring, owls prey on petrel eggs and chicks. Without mice, believe owls would move on. Owls are killed by gulls or starve.

Long-term hope to eradicate the mice. In interim, trap burrowing owls and relocate back to mainland. Released 3 owls at Warm Springs, south of Fremont in 2005.

Monitored translocated owls 1 week to 3 ½ months. Dead mice left for 3 to 7 days. No owls returned to Farallons.

Mouse eradication options, mostly have to use rodenticide (anticoagulants)
bait stations
aerial broadcast
eradicate when no seabird breeding
no raptors in winter when the rodenticide used.

5. November BUOW Celebration Report, Catherine Portman

BUOW Preservation Society starting a BUOW festival Nov. 4, 2006 BUOW artists and advocates in Yolo County.

Also reported on Lancaster problem that Friends of Prime Desert Woodland with BUOW habitat, inadequate assessment, and a planned development. No project mitigation.

Jack, International Burrowing Owl Symposium October 2-3, 2006 in Veracruz, Mexico in conjunction with the IV North American Ornithological Conference, October 3-7, 2006.

Imperial Valley Irrigation District, RFP issued for long-term BUOW investigation
Pete Bloom's organization was selected for the project.

East Bay Regional Park District, Doug Bell
Want to alter grazing practices away from the turbine areas to disperse the prey population. East Bay Parks have received gifts of lands with turbines. East Bay Parks have 73 turbines on one of their parks in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area.

NEXT MEETING

September 14, 2006, 10am-2pm, here at refuge.

Meeting chairperson: Nancy Teater, Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society