

[evergreenaudubon.org](https://www.evergreenaudubon.org)

Wild Evergreen – Colorado Owls – Evergreen Audubon

7-9 minutes



Great Horned Owl near nest site – Bergen Village. Photo by Marilyn Rhodes.

Great Horned Owl – Bergen Village

On April 13th, Sydney Hogling alerted me to a Great Horned Owl nesting in Bergen Village that she has observed since mid of March. “Yesterday, a murder of crows was bugging her early in the morning as she sat on the horizontal beam on the right.... Art and I went by to see what we could about 5 PM. We saw one, maybe two little furry heads with straight up ears, pop up and

down a few times, then a rather large head slowly rose up....It's so exciting to watch this drama unfold.

“A nest was built in that spot last year. It seemed the crows were the architects, tho. Many of them around for weeks on end.



Adult female Great Horned Owl on the nest – Bergen Village.

Photo by Marilyn Rhodes

“Then I went out of town or something, and saw no more activity until a few weeks ago.

“I was there yesterday, April 15, saw nothing popping its head out of the nest, but an adult in the uppermost horizontal rafter at the apex of the roof. Looks like that is favorite place to observe.

These guys really have themselves well protected, with the side of the building shielding them and the extend roofline protecting them from weather and dive bombing crows and others wishing to bother them.”

Burrowing Owls are back!



Burrowing Owls – Chatfield State Park

The Burrowing Owl colony many have enjoyed off the road south of Roxborough Park was forced to relocate when the prairie dog town was leveled. Fortunately, they appear to have relocated to the prairie dog town on the south end of Chatfield State Park, directly behind the airfield. Photo by Peter Pereira.

Colorado's breeding hooters...

I led an owling field trip for the Denver Audubon Master Birder candidates on April 9th with my friend, fellow owl enthusiast, and bird atlas junkie, Doug Kibbe. Doug prepared these notes on the 12 owl species that breed in Colorado and I prepared the chart that follows. I hope you'll find the information valuable this nesting season.

The Snowy Owl is an irruptive visitor that does not breed in our state. The Barred Owl is an eastern bird that breeds as far west as the Oklahoma panhandle. It could soon be our 13th breeder.

Owls (Strigiformes)

Barn Owl – nests from April – October In CO, breeds in open country at generally low elevations, using human-made structures, hollow trees, cliffs, and burrows in banks as nest sites. At least some portion of the population is migratory. Feeds on small rodents captured while flying over open fields. Clutch size and number of broods raised per year influenced by prey availability. Males may have more than one mate. Nest sites often taken over by Great Horned Owls and Barn Owls would likely benefit greatly from provision of artificial nest boxes. Recorded in 186 Atlas blocks.

Flammulated Owl – Breeds from mid May – mid August.

Widespread cavity nester in CO mountains – possibly the commonest small owl in the state – typically found in Ponderosa Pine at middle elevations. Sexes identical. Insectivorous, preying on moths, and, consequently, highly migratory. 155 atlas blocks.

Western Screech-Owl – 10 February – 31 August Resident cavity nester at low elevations in cottonwood gallery forest in major West Slope river systems and in the Arkansas River drainage from about Cañon City downstream; also occurs in tall Piñon-Juniper in Las Animas and Huerfano counties and may do so elsewhere. More insectivorous than Eastern Screech-Owl. Male become less responsive to tape playbacks during the nesting period. Receptive to nest box placement on west slope (i.e. Grand Junction area). Recorded in 34 atlas blocks.

Eastern Screech-Owl – Cavity nester from mid February – August. Resident in cottonwood gallery forest and old suburban and urban neighborhoods in the South Platte River drainage and at the eastern end of the Arkansas River drainage (at least, in Prowers County, where overlap with Western Screech-Owl has been confirmed); a few scattered breeding-season records from central-eastern counties (Kiowa, Cheyenne) suggest possible widespread, but very local, distribution elsewhere on the plains in southeastern CO. Diverse food habits include insects, small mammals, herps, and aquatic fauna. Recorded in 75 atlas blocks.

Great Horned Owl – Breeds from mid January – July.

Widespread in CO and catholic in its habitat choice, though uncommon to rare at high elevations, and in dense forest. Sexes

identical; As with all other owls, it does not construct its own nest, using existing structures made by raptors, corvids, or cavities in cliffs, trees, bridges, or buildings. Recorded in 842 atlas blocks.

Northern Pygmy-Owl – Breeds in cavities from mid February – July. Widespread, though possibly somewhat local in occurrence in CO mountains, usually in situations with a juxtaposition of multiple forest types, particularly conifers and aspen, and some open habitat. May exhibit elevational migration in winter. Diurnal, preying on birds as well as small rodents and herps. Recorded in 99 atlas blocks.

Burrowing Owl –Breeds from April – mid August. Found in open country, particularly grassland, with most of CO's breeding population on the eastern plains; species is declining sharply in population and range on West Slope; rare in mountain parks. Nests underground and feeds on insects. Highly migratory. Recorded in 528 atlas blocks.

Spotted Owl – Breeds from March – July. Rare and quite local in deeply-incised and, particularly, shady canyons; apparently most common in the Wet Mountains and southern Front Range, though with known occurrence in southwestern corner of CO, the latter area has not been surveyed sufficiently; nests on cliffs or on existing nest structures. Principal prey is small mammals. Recorded in 8 atlas blocks.

Snowy Owl – Non breeder, irruptic winter visitor to Colorado in search of lemmings(?).

Long-eared Owl – Breeds from mid February – mid July. This is, possibly, the owl species in CO that occupies the widest range of

elevation; it also utilizes a wide variety of habitats from tamarisk stands at low elevations to Spruce-Fir forests near treeline, as long as there is nearby open country for foraging. Utilizes old corvid nests with young frequently becoming “branchlings” long before they can fly. Irregular breeder in many locations, depending upon availability of small rodents. Recorded in 116 atlas blocks.

Short-eared Owl – 15 March – 10 August Rare and local CO breeder in open country (grassland, marshes), though relatively common in San Luis Valley (at least in and near Monte Vista NWR); however, like many owls specializing on one type of prey (small mammals), not all breeding locales are occupied every year. Sexes nearly identical. Recorded in 7 atlas blocks.

Boreal Owl – Nests in cavities from mid February – mid August. Local or still overlooked at high elevations in mountains. Primary prey is red-backed vole. Recorded in 47 atlas blocks.

Northern Saw-whet Owl – 10 February – 15 August Widespread in coniferous habitat in mountains, but also utilizes aspen and cottonwood habitats; widespread winterer in Piñon-Juniper, though unknown how much that habitat used for breeding (although males can be heard singing there in late winter/early spring). Eastern US populations are highly migratory and western US populations may be to a lesser degree. Primary prey is small mammals. Recorded in 194 atlas blocks.

[Download Colorado Owl Reference Chart](#)