

Short-eared Owl

Asio flammeus

STATUS

Special Concern 

Not Listed 

13



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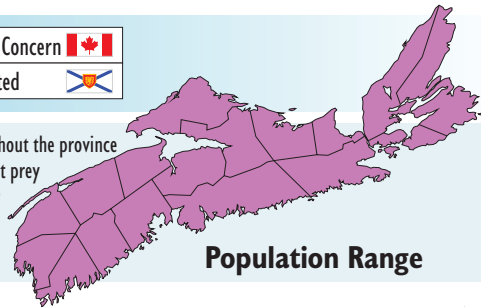
Species Description

The Short-eared Owl is medium-sized (34-43 cm), with yellowish-brown streaks on the breast and back. It has a large round head with small ear tufts, a grey (or buffy-grey) facial disk and yellow eyes circled in black. In flight, a characteristic dark patch is apparent on the underside of the wing near the wrist (85-103 cm wingspan).



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Uncommonly found throughout the province in grasslands with sufficient prey populations. Winters in the southern USA and Mexico, and occasionally in Nova Scotia.



Population Range

Habitat

Hunts and roosts in the summer in open grassy habitats such as coastal dunes, marshland, abandoned pastures, and grassy fields. Typically nests in grasslands, dyked wet meadows, marshes, and coastal bogs. Roosts in the winter in dense hedges and islands of coniferous forests adjacent to grassy agricultural fields or coastal meadows.



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Short-eared Owls are typically observed in open grassy habitats in the summer and in dense hedges in the winter.

Interesting Points

- Calls no place “home”- moves from location to location in search of food.
- Their “short-ears” are actually feather tufts! Their actual ears are hidden beneath their feathers on the side of their head.
- Nest on the ground (unlike many other owl species)- young owlets learn how to walk and run before they learn how to fly.
- Mainly active at dusk and dawn.

Similar Species

Northern Harrier (Marsh Hawk):

Larger (46-50 cm); occur in the same habitat with similar flight pattern; males have a white patch above the tail and a sharp, down-turned beak. Females are brown.



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Long-eared Owl:

Similar size (35-40 cm); can be confused in winter in roost habitats; in the summer found in field edges and spruce-fir forests; darker plumage that is more heavily streaked.



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Threats to Survival

- Habitat loss and fragmentation (wetland drainage, urban development, intensive farming practices).
- Habitat alteration from the conversion of agricultural grasslands (hay, alfalfa) to alternative crops (sod, short grass), and the removal of hedgerows.
- Nests are vulnerable to predators and machinery.



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Feather “ear” tufts

How You Can Help

Farmers are encouraged to set aside sections of their fields to provide nesting and hunting habitat for Short-eared Owls. Farmers can also harvest their crops after the nesting season (after July 1st) to avoid destroying nests and harming young.



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Owlets are unable to fly for about four weeks

Contacts, Information & Sighting Reports

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.speciesatrisk.gc.ca, Maritimes Breeding Bird Atlas: www.mba-aom.ca

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings, eBird.org