

# Manitoba Species at Risk

## Short-eared Owl

*Asio flammeus*



Christian Artuso



Habitat



Diet



Provincially  
Threatened

### Short-eared Owl Range Map



\* Range map based on potential range.

The Short-eared Owl is listed provincially as Threatened and federally as Special Concern. Unlike many species of owls, Short-eared Owls are known to hunt during the day, where they can be seen flying low over short vegetation in search of prey.

Short-eared Owls breed in all of Canada's provinces and territories, but are most frequently found in the Prairie Provinces and along the arctic coast, where open country is prevalent and small rodent populations are abundant. Studies suggest declines are particularly high in the Canadian populations, with a rate of loss approaching 30% per decade.

### Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)

- Preserve and create large blocks of grasslands and wetlands
- Periodically burn, mow, or graze grass (on a 2-8 year cycle)
- Avoid haying or heavy grazing until after early July
- Remove unused fences or increase visibility of fences by hanging pieces of ribbon or foil
- Encourage habitat for prey species and reduce the use of rodenticides
- Limit the use of organochlorine-based pesticides, as they have been known to cause reproductive failure among birds due to thinning of their egg shells

Co-benefiting Species: The BMPs listed for this species may also benefit Ferruginous Hawks, Loggerhead Shrikes and Common Nighthawks.

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## More about the Short-eared Owl

### Description

The Short-eared Owl is medium-sized (34 to 42 cm long) owl, with a large round head and small tufts of feathers resembling "ears". Black-rimmed yellow eyes and a pale facial disk make this owl's face quite striking.

### Habitat

Short eared owls live in large, open areas with low vegetation, such as prairie and coastal grasslands, marshes, peat bogs, and agricultural areas. Breeding habitat required for this species includes tall grasses for roosting and areas with an abundance of food. They require large uninterrupted tracts of open grasslands and appear to be particularly sensitive to habitat loss and fragmentation.

### Threats

Habitat loss and degradation due to development, recreation, and agricultural practices, appear to be the major causes of population decline for the Short-eared Owl. Ill-timed livestock and haying practices and pesticide use, may also be a significant source of egg and nestling mortality.

### Outlook

Critical habitat conservation and management strategies, as well as ongoing research into pesticide impacts, will help ensure a healthy future for this species.

### Producer Benefits

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is a voluntary, confidential, self-assessment process, enabling farm managers to develop an action plan to address agri-environmental assets and risks in their operation. Completion of an EFP may qualify you for funding to implement BMPs on your land. For more information or to register, contact your local Manitoba Agriculture office.

Beyond the species benefits, BMPs can help your operation through:

- Access to on-farm programs and incentives
- Meet emerging market demands for sustainable sourcing
- Increased agricultural sustainability
- Greater resilience to events such as insect outbreaks, floods and droughts
- Better pest control and management
- Improved water quality, quantity and erosion control
- Improved pasture and forage

For more information regarding beneficial management practices on your land, please contact Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation or the organizations listed below.

## FUN FACT

Female Short-eared Owls that are forced to flush from their nests often defecate on their eggs. The resulting putrid smell may repel predators or mask the scent of the nest.

### Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

[www.mhhc.mb.ca](http://www.mhhc.mb.ca)

### Conservation Data Centre

[www.manitoba.ca/sd/cdc](http://www.manitoba.ca/sd/cdc)

### Manitoba Agriculture

[www.manitoba.ca/agriculture](http://www.manitoba.ca/agriculture)

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