

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

East Contra Costa conservation group protects at-risk burrowing owls

By Roni Gehlke
For the Contra Costa Times

Posted: 08/24/2011 02:12:46 PM PDT

What started out as monitoring of burrowing owls living in a field next to his home quickly snowballed for Scott Artis into protecting the small creatures. Before long, a website about the owls blossomed into an organization that receives calls from all over the nation in an effort to help a bird that is less than a foot tall and weighs no more than a pound.

"People didn't realize what they were doing," the Antioch resident said. "They were off road racing and trashing the property during the breeding season."

In 2008 Scott and his wife, Heather, were walking in their neighborhood when they noticed the small owls, known for keeping their homes in small holes under ground. Worried for the burrowing owls' future, Artis contacted the city of Antioch. He quickly learned all about the small creatures and determined that it wasn't a good idea to just move the owls to another location.

"Burrowing owls are driven by instinct to return to the same area each year," Artis said.

If that area is later developed with homes, he wondered what would happen to the owls. While the burrowing owl is only considering an "at risk" and not an "endangered" species, there is no relief for keeping their habitats untouched, he said.

Artis' research and work with the city led him to start the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network in 2008.

The group's program manager, Dee Vieira, spearheaded the allocation and development of a 24-acre burrowing owl

preservation habitat at Antioch's Prewett Family Park

in 2008. Vieira persuaded the city and Department of Fish & Game to agree to the establishment of Contra Costa County's first burrowing owl preserve as mitigation for displaced owls.

By 2010 the small group was given the chance to partner with Earth Island Institute to work on the preservation of the burrowing owls in the San Francisco Bay Area, California and North America by approving a species-specific conservation project. Earth Island is now providing sponsorship to the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network and bolstering much-needed support for the imperiled raptor.

As a project under Earth Island, Artis' organization is eligible to receive nonprofit status.

Even before he learned about burrowing owls, Artis had an interest in wildlife and conservation. In 2003 he cofounded a nonprofit public benefit organization that developed and executed community-based programs for the protection of native plants, animals and their natural community. For four years he worked as the president of the ECHO Fund Inc. organization. Artis believes this experience helped him in his efforts to help the burrowing owls.

In his professional life Artis holds degrees in micro and molecular biology, and environmental sciences with a concentration on fisheries and wildlife sciences. For 10 years he has worked in the molecular and cellular biology research field.

Artis is also a board member of the John Muir Association, a member of the Society for



HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE
up to **64%**

Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71
or call 1-877-605-0496

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

Conservation Biology, the Raptor Research Foundation and The Wildlife Society, including the Western Section and Public Conservation Education and Outreach Working Group. He is pursuing a master's degree in environmental sciences and policy.

Artis and his wife also enjoy wildlife photography and host a website where they sell their photos at www.wildlifephotostudio.com.

Artis said that volunteers are always needed for the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network. For more information, check out the organization's website at www.burrowingowlconservation.org.



HEARTLAND QUALITY
OMAHA STEAKS
SINCE 1917

SAVE
up to **64%**

Plus, get
3 FREE Gifts

Special Code: 45069ZWN

To order: www.OmahaSteaks.com/print71
or call 1-877-605-0496

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™