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Helping the Valley's Burrowing Owl survive

Thursday, July 28th, 2011 | Posted by [Suzie Rodriguez](#) | [5 responses](#)



Until a few decades ago, California's Burrowing Owl had a thriving population.

But these days the Burrowing Owl is in trouble, its population severely decreased by loss of habitat and other threats. It's currently on the "species of concern" list, the last stage before being considered an endangered species.

The Burrowing Owl was once a common sight in Sonoma Valley, but its last recorded nesting site hereabouts was in 1985 on Scaggs Island.

Luckily for the Burrowing Owl — and us — the [nation's #1 birder](#), Sonoma resident Tom Rusert, has pulled together a consortium of organizations, including [Sonoma Birding](#), [Sonoma Land Trust](#) and the [Burrowing Owl Conservation Network](#), to construct artificial habitat for the owl.

Unlike other owls, the Burrowing Owl makes its nest underground, often in abandoned rodent burrows. In the first phase of the consortium's habitat project, artificial owl burrows are being established on private and public land in six Sonoma Valley locations.

Here are a few related photos, courtesy of Tom Rusert:



All three groups, along with youths from the AmeriCorps summer conservation program, gathered July 14 at Sears Point to help install an owl burrow. The tubes limit the number of potential predators that could disrupt the owls and the distance gives them time to escape out the other entrance.

These kids are being briefed by the network's founder Scott Artis about how the habitat will function.



Scott Artis and Tom Rusert at one of the two entrances to the buried burrowing habitat; it has two 4-inch diameter, 12-foot long entries that gradually slope down and connect into a

buried half barrel.



A good day's work by the whole team.



Note the long legs of the Burrowing Owl; this is an atypical trait among owls.

Download a copy of the Burrowing Owl Conservation Network's [July-September newsletter](#), which contains an article about burrow habitat construction in Sonoma.

—[Suzie Rodriguez](#)

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