

## PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

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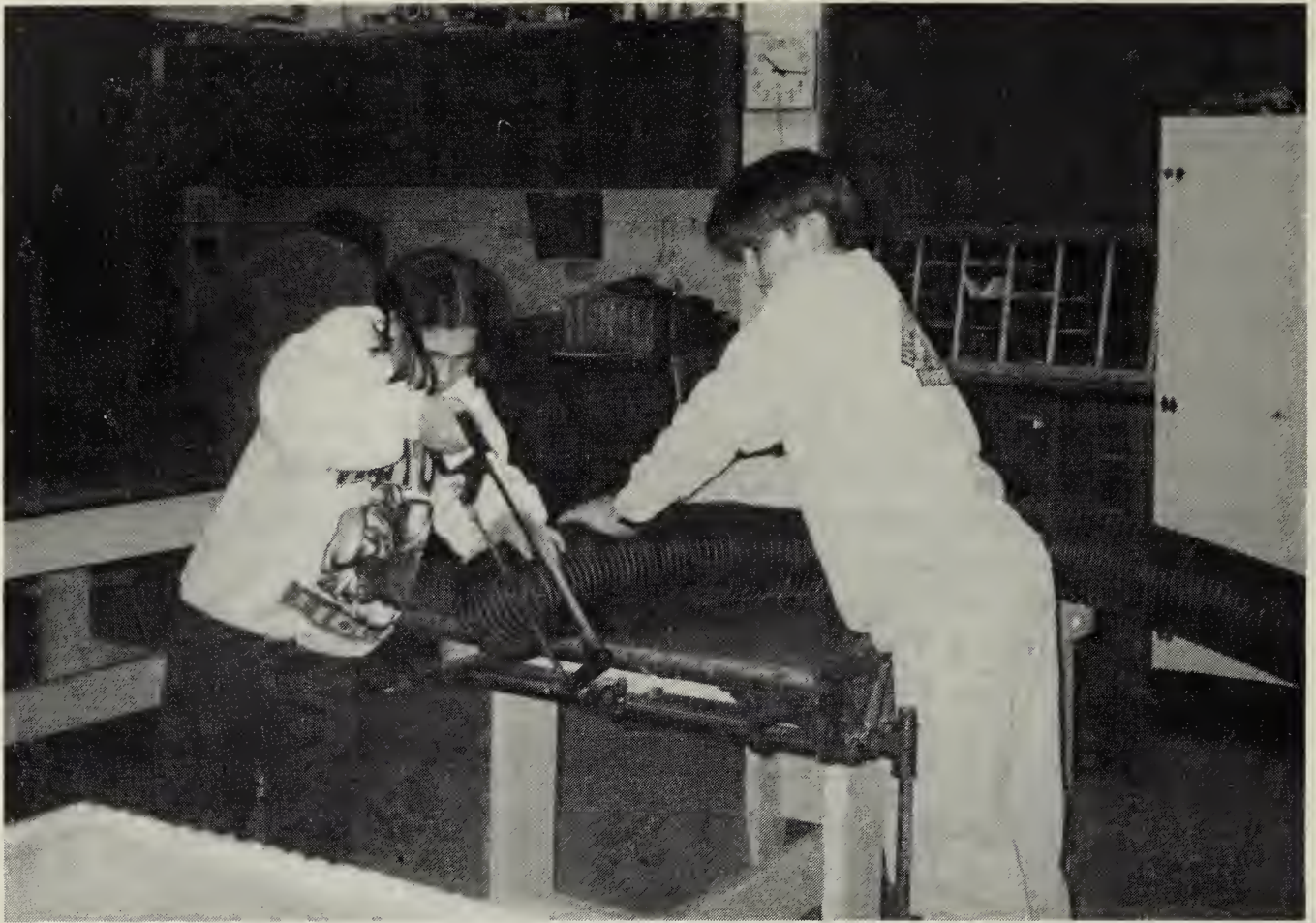
In the autumn of 1994, a group of Weyburn Junior High students were studying endangered species as part of their English program. The students took a particular interest in the plight of the Burrowing Owl. Many of the students had seen this species in the rural areas surrounding Weyburn, and during classroom discussion an idea was spawned to investigate the possibility of assisting in the conservation of the Burrowing Owl.

Several students expressed the motivation which prompted their involvement. Perry Benning, age 15, said "I want the Burrowing Owls to have a safe home." Brent Chinski, age 14, stated "We are building the boxes because the owls need their

habitat. Right now it's being destroyed by pesticides and by cities that are getting bigger." Derek Littlejohn, age 15, expressed the sentiments of all students when he said "I think it's important for kids to get involved. Making the boxes during Industrial Arts is perfect — we learn about woodworking and help the owls at the same time."

I contacted Heather Dundas, Program Coordinator at Nature Saskatchewan, and the wheels were set in motion to form a partnership which would be beneficial to both the students and the Burrowing Owl. With funding from a Nature Saskatchewan Members Initiatives Grant, the students constructed 15 Burrowing Owl

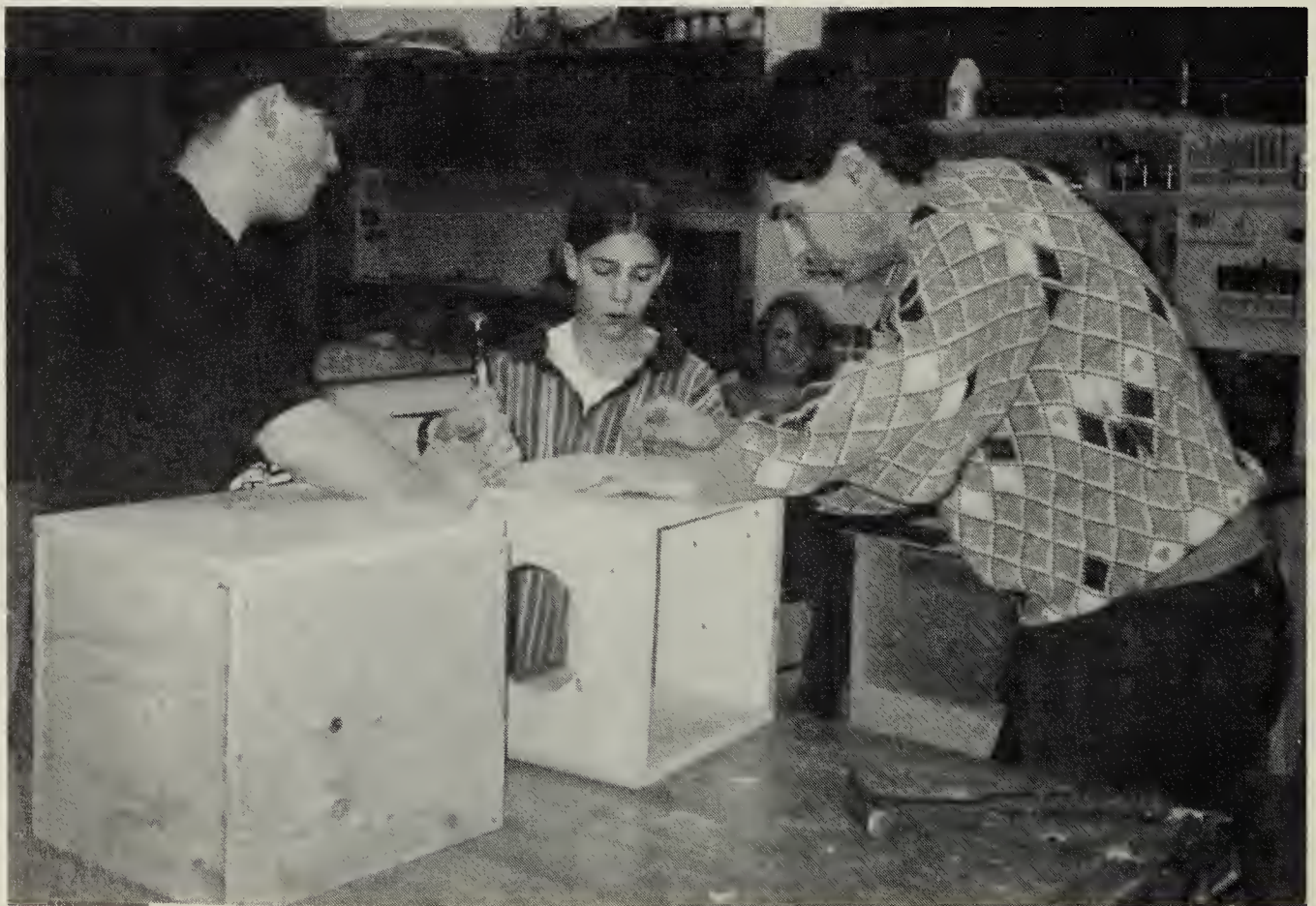




nest boxes during their weekly Industrial Arts class over the course of a three-month period.

Bob Baragar and myself were the teachers involved with the direct supervision of the project. As well as developing basic woodworking skills,

this project has allowed the students to develop attitudes and knowledge about endangered species and their need for protection. It has also shown the students "they can make a difference today" in the protection of species for tomorrow's generation to enjoy. Bob Baragar confirmed that





the students gained practical wood-working skills as well as gaining environmental awareness. The construction of nest boxes enabled the students to follow a step by step plan to reach the goal while developing the practical skills involved with carpentry.



At the completion of the project Tara Gonty, age 15, declared that she really enjoyed working on this project. Justin MacLeod, age 15, felt that he had gained skills in working with wood as well as learning a lot about the Burrowing Owl. Marsh Thompson, age 13, suggested that



“this project was so good because it was useful — we were helping a species survive.”

The final stage in this project was the installation of the nest boxes in the rural area surrounding Weyburn. On 8 June all of the partners came together to bury the boxes. Heather Dundas and two Regina volunteers, Darin Thibodeau and Dan Vetter, travelled by van to Weyburn, picked up the students and headed to the first of three selected sites. At the end of the day, nine boxes had been successfully buried on the farmland owned by farmers who were members of Operation Burrowing Owl. The remaining six boxes will be sent to designated sites throughout southern Saskatchewan.

At the end of the day Greg Johnston, age 15, and Mike Nieszner, age 14, both said that they had fun — “digging holes was hard work but

it was fun.” Joey Gonty and Mark Preston, both 14, stated that “it was great to be outdoors for the day but the mosquitoes really enjoyed having us out in the fields.” Adam Sandeski, age 14, summed up the entire experience, from the initial discussion to burying the boxes — “It’s really nice to know that when people work together good things can happen.”

The students are proud to have been able to assist the Burrowing Owl. They also realize that it required a joint effort for this project to be realized. Without the cooperation and funding from Nature Saskatchewan, this venture would have remained in the discussion stage. We can make a difference when we work together.

**Editor’s Note:** All photos demonstrating the building and installation of Burrowing Owl boxes taken by Gaye Morris.

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### Nest Box Construction for Burrowing Owls

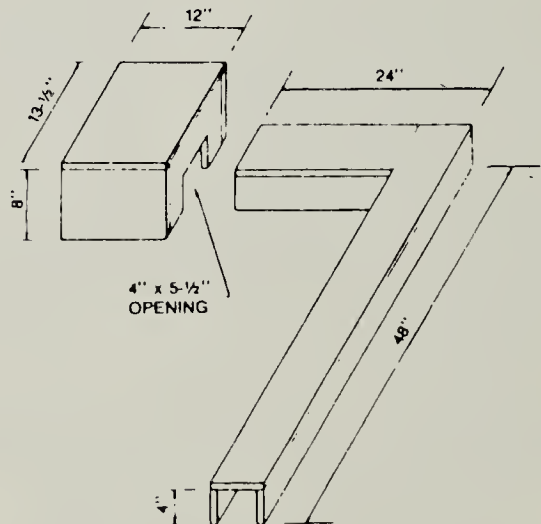
You need the following pieces of 3/4” plywood:

Nest box:

- Top - 12” x 13 1/2” (1)
- Walls - 8” x 12” (4)
  - one with 4” x 5 1/2” opening

Tunnel:

- Tops - 6” x 48” (1)
  - 6” x 17 7/8” (1)
- Walls - 4” x 48” (1)
  - 4” x 42” (1)
  - 4” x 23 1/4” (1)
  - 4” x 18 3/4” (1)



Nail the pieces together as shown and place the nest box in a pasture away from trees. It should be buried at least 6” below the ground with the tunnel gradually sloping up to the surface. Leave a dirt mound near the opening; owls like to sit on it. Boxes are especially effective in increasing the number of owls nesting in an existing colony but each pair likes some space so place boxes 50 metres or more apart. (Source: “Operation Burrowing Owl,” SNHS brochure.)