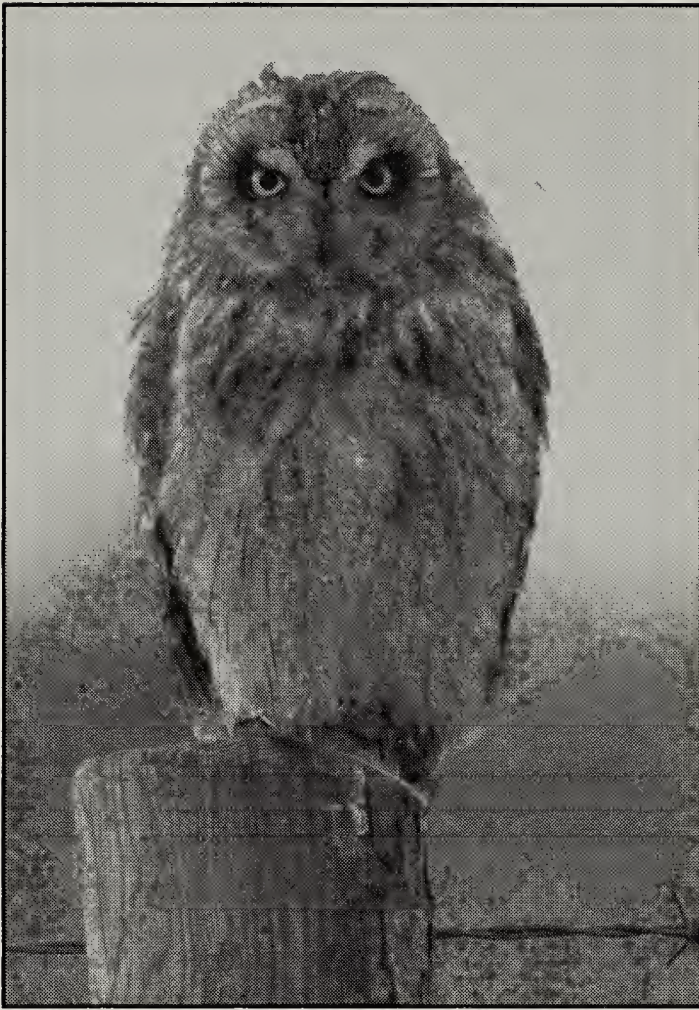


SHORT-EARED OWL



Short-eared Owl.

Ryan Fisher

This Short-eared Owl was photographed in the Last Mountain Lake National Wildlife Area, SK, in late June 2006. Short-eared Owls are an eruptive species, meaning that large numbers of these owls tend to show up in certain parts of the country and in certain years when voles (their primary prey item) are plentiful. 2006 was a good year for Short-eared Owls in the Last Mountain Lake area, and we frequently observed this individual sitting on the same fence line night after night.

It is interesting to note that in 2006 we observed five to ten Short-eared Owls every day within the wildlife area, while in 2007 and 2008, in the exact same area, we were lucky to see one or two all year.

Short-Eared Owls inhabit marshes and grasslands of Saskatchewan, but also range across much of North America and will even nest in the high-artic tundra. They primarily feed on small mammals (such as voles), but they have also been known to eat small birds. Short-eared Owls nest on the ground in relatively tall, dense, grassland (30-60 cm high). Because of their propensity to nest in grasslands and because of their relatively large area requirements, Short-eared Owls are susceptible to human disturbance in the form of agriculture and habitat loss. Because of this sensitivity, they are considered a species of Special Concern by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada, meaning that they have the potential to become a threatened or endangered species.

So, when you are out on the prairie, always keep an eye open for a Short-eared Owl (or many Short-eared Owls, if you happen to be in a good area or in a good year with a lot of voles).

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Nature will bear the closest inspection. She invites us to lay our eye level with her smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain.

- *Henry David Thoreau*