

Endangered Species and Spaces

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4.13 Flammulated Owl: *Otus flammeolus* (Kaup)

Order: *Strigiformes*
Family: *Strigidae*

Status

Global Rank: G4
 Provincial Rank: S3S4B, SZN
 COSEWIC: Vulnerable

Provincial Listing: [Blue list](#)



Distinguishing Features

A small owl, similar to the Screech Owl, but even smaller and has dark instead of yellow eyes, shorter ear tufts and naked toes. Generally greyish-brown with prominent dark streaks. Light buffy coloured abdomen again heavily streaked with darker brown. Total length 16 -19 cm. (Godfrey, 1986).

Distribution

Columbia Basin: Southern Rocky Mountain Trench as far north as Radium.

British Columbia: Currently known to breed in dry forests of the southern interior as far north as McLeese Lake, north of Williams Lake. Confirmed sightings from the Rocky Mountain Trench, at least as far north as Radium Hot Springs, suggest breeding there (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Global: Breeds in w. North America from the s. interior of British Columbia, east to w. Montana, Colorado, New Mexico, and south to Mexico (McCallum 1994a).

Winters in c. and s. Mexico, as far south as Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Cannings et al. In Prep.).

Habitat

In British Columbia, Flammulated Owls inhabit mature and old-growth montane forests, primarily within the Interior Douglas-fir biogeoclimatic zone. Forests over 100 years old seem to be preferred. Breeding habitat generally has widely spaced, uneven-aged Douglas-fir, often interspersed with ponderosa pine and thickets of young Douglas-fir that serve as security and foraging habitat. Flammulated Owls are secondary cavity-nesters, using old woodpecker holes in older decaying and dead trees,

and occasionally nest boxes. The understory is typically open, consisting of pine grass, birch-leaved spirea, and other large shrubs (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Threats

Timber harvesting in older Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine forests has the single greatest impact on Flammulated Owl breeding habitat in British Columbia by affecting cavity and prey availability. Firewood cutting and removal of "danger trees" can also reduce the availability of nest trees. As a secondary cavity-nester, they are potentially sensitive to changes in woodpecker populations. An intrinsically low reproductive rates as a potential long-term threat to maintaining viable populations in the face of persistent habitat changes. There is speculation that predation by Barred Owls, grazing and fire management may also effect this species. Land clearing and secondary insecticide poisoning are also threats (Cannings et al. In prep.).

Biology

In late April, Flammulated Owls begin to arrive in British Columbia and eggs are laid in late May to early July. Clutch size ranges from 1 to 5. Depending on annual variations in weather, hatching occurs from early June to the end of July followed by a three-week fledging period. Immature owls are independent of parents 25 - 32 days after fledging and disperse 30 -35 days later. Northern populations begin autumn migration in August or early September (Cannings et al. In prep.)

Flammulated Owls are mainly insect eaters, feeding opportunistically on adult and larval moths; spruce budworms, beetles, grasshoppers and crickets. They are "sit and wait" predators, hunting at night by visually locating prey from their perch, then flying to capture it in the air or pick it off needles, branches or the ground. Dawn and dusk seem to be peak foraging periods (Cannings et al. In prep.).



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