

**Project Perch's mission is to protect and nurture the Burrowing Owl in SE Florida.
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Project Perch's BuOw Blog 22

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Too Famous For Their Own Good – The Park Owls and the Paparazzi

FL Wildlife Photographers, Natural Florida & Florida Birds FB Sites,

This letter is from Project Perch whose mission is to protect and nurture Florida's burrowing owl, a threatened species. The Florida burrowing owl is threatened for a reason; human disturbance in all forms is killing them.

Unfortunately, some of the owls at our parks have become quite famous and are the subject of several unethical photographers. The parks have reacted by adding signs and asking all visitors to stay back 20 feet. This is an arbitrary distance decided by park officials who are trying to manage photographers that will not respect the owls' need for space. The FWC's recommended guideline for the Florida burrowing owl is 50 feet.

Anytime the owl has to focus on the photographer or camera, it is disturbed. When the owl has to change what it is doing, display, hiss or fly, then it is disturbed. Juveniles parallax at the camera and photographer because they are being forced to focus on something foreign in their environment. It may seem fun and friendly, but the owls are wasting their time and energy and that in turn reduces their fitness.

Owlet survival rates are not good. Like any parents with lots of young, the owls' resources are stretched thin. If the owls are to survive, all of the owls must do their jobs. Parents need rest during the day so they can proficiently hunt and meet the young's food needs. Owlets must exercise their wings, catch their own insects and learn to watch out for avian predators. Sadly, these owls' spend their days watching photographers instead. The photographer's combined effect is constant disturbance that reduces the chances that the owlets will live.

We're asking the photographic community to be part of the solution and give these owls the peace they need to raise their families successfully. Everyone should adhere to the FWC's recommended guideline and stay back 50 feet. We also want to thank all of the ethical photographers for helping to protect the owls, reporting their harassment and protesting content that was obtained while disturbing them.

Sincerely,

Kelly Heffernan, Director of Project Perch and Grant Campbell, Conservation Chair & Director of Wildlife Policy
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