

Introduction

The Mexican spotted owl (MSO) is a medium-sized owl, mottled with irregular white and brown spotting on the body and head. MSO adults are typically about 0.4 m (17 in.) in length and have a wingspan of about 1.0 m (3.3 ft.).

Legal Status

On March 16, 1993 the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) listed the Mexican spotted owl as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The ruling, which is based on the best available scientific information, found that the Mexican spotted owl is likely to become in danger of extinction with the foreseeable future. The

“threatened” status provides the species protection under section 4(d) of the ESA. To further aid in recovery, the FWS officially designated critical habitat for Mexican spotted owls on August 31, 2004.



Photo: Shaula Hedwall

Where are Mexican Spotted Owls found?

Currently, Mexican spotted owl populations exist in several different habitat types. Owls can be found living in mature montane forest, oak woodlands, shady wooded canyons and canyons with steep cliffs containing ledges and rock outcroppings. MSO generally prefer mature, older forests comprised of ponderosa pine and Gambel oak. Owls typically nest in mature live trees, snags (dead trees) and canyon walls. Historically, MSO populations were found from the southern Rocky Mountains in Colorado, mountains of Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Additionally, MSO populations can also be found in Mexico’s Sierra Madre Occidental and Oriental mountain ranges.

Threats to Mexican Spotted Owls:

- Destruction and modification of nesting habitat
 - a. Catastrophic, stand replacing wildfire
- Predation by other owl species such as barred owls (*Strix varia*).
- Habitat fragmentation from development.



ADOT Activities That Could Potentially Harm Mexican Spotted Owls

- Construction projects occurring within or near core nesting areas. These core areas are called PAC's (protected activity centers). PAC's are comprised of up to 600 acres of the best available habitat surrounded the nesting area.
 - a. Timing is key- owls can be easily disturbed during the nesting season (March 1 through August 31)
 - b. Potential effect: Noise from construction (jackhammering, milling pavement, blasting rock)
 - c. Nighttime work- Owls forage at night and can become disorientated from loud noises or bright lights from a construction project.



Photo: Shaula Hedwall

If you encounter a Mexican Spotted Owl

- Stop work immediately and back out of area.
- Do not harass or try to scare the owl out of the area.
- Report any sightings or encounters to the ADOT Biologist, Joshua Fife (602-622-9622)
- If the owl appears to be in distress or has visible injuries:
 - a. Notify your supervisor immediately.
 - b. Contact the ADOT Biologist, Joshua Fife (602-622-9622)

How to Help Mexican Spotted Owls

- On construction projects- adhere to all environmental commitments included in special provisions. If you don't know or are not sure, ASK.
- Plan and schedule any maintenance work. Work with your District Environmental Coordinator and Environmental Planning biologists to obtain a review for maintenance work that may affect MSO or MSO habitat. Supervisors and Leads should become familiar with the ADOT maintenance review process
- Use caution when driving at night- Owls have been struck on the highway.
- Pick up trash and litter- garbage can attract rodents and other small mammals which may attract owls to forage in the right-of-way.

---If you don't know or are unsure of what to do, ASK!---

If you observe poaching, collecting, selling, or any other illegal activities, contact AGFD's OPERATION GAME THIEF at **1-800-352-0700**, 24 hours a day or on the internet at

<http://www.azgfd.gov/ogt.shtml>