



Mexican Spotted Owl

Background

The Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) is one of three sub-species of spotted owl in North America. These owls prefer highly structured habitat, either in dense forests or deep canyons. In April 1993, the Mexican spotted owl was listed as Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Threats to this species include habitat degradation and loss; recreation; and predation from other raptors. Critical Habitat has been designated for this owl in a number of southwestern states, including Arizona. In Saguaro National Park, Mexican spotted owls inhabit forested areas at high elevations in the Rincon Mountain District. Here, their habitat is carefully managed and their populations are monitored.

Status and Trends

In Saguaro National Park, Mexican spotted owl territories (designated “Protected Activity Centers” or “PACs”) are carefully managed. Each PAC has been monitored regularly since 1995, and the Mexican spotted owl population in the park appears to be stable. Park projects, such as trail work or prescribed burning, occurring in or near Mexican spotted owl habitat are scrutinized and, if necessary, modified to ensure the owls will not be adversely affected.



Photo by A. Moors

Quick Facts

- While most owls have yellow eyes, Mexican spotted owls have dark eyes.
- Great-horned owls and other raptors are predators of Mexican spotted owls.
- Surveys of Mexican spotted owls in the park have revealed banded owls from the nearby Coronado National Forest.

Discussion

With regular monitoring and careful management of Mexican spotted owls and their habitat in the park, biologists are optimistic this species will continue to inhabit the forested areas of the Rincon Mountains.

More Information

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Saguaro Website: <http://www.nps.gov/sagu/naturescience>
Southwest Learning Center: <http://www.southwestlearning.org>
I&M Sonoran Desert Network: <http://science.nature.nps.gov/im/inventory>



One chick (center), known to have fled in 2009, roosts with a parent (right) near Italian Springs Trail. Photo by S. Grater