
2014 STATEWIDE WINTER OWL SURVEYS (ORAL PRESENTATION AND POSTER)

Bryce Maxell*, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena, MT

Lauri Hanauska-Brown, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Helena, MT

Localized winter owl surveys have been conducted in Montana in the past, but a coordinated statewide effort had never been undertaken. Eleven owl species were, therefore, listed as Species of Highest Inventory Need by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the Montana Natural Heritage Program. We coordinated statewide winter owl call surveys in 180 of the 185 quarter latitude/longitude (QLL) blocks that encompass Montana. Call transects each consisted of 10 call stations spaced at 1-mile intervals along a 9-mile long road transect within a QLL block. At each call station, observers alternately silently listened for owl calls and played owl calls for species likely to occur in the surrounding habitat. A total of 1,829 call stations were surveyed and a total of 511 owls across 11 owl species were detected. Detections during the 2014 surveys nearly, or more than, doubled the number of records with indirect evidence for breeding that have been gathered in Montana across all time for Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, and Short-eared Owl. We recommend that these species and the Northern Saw-whet Owl be removed from the Montana Species of Highest Inventory Need as a result of the information gathered during these surveys.