

Discovery of a Burrowing Owl Near Morehead City, N.C.

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On 13 June 1972, while conducting a tern and skimmer nesting census on a large dredge spoil island (Brant Island) 1 mile NW of Ft. Macon, the writers saw what they believed to be a Burrowing Owl (*Speotyto cunicularia*). However, it was seen only briefly and in poor light, so they decided not to report the sighting.

After three trips to the island during the next 2 months, Fussell again found the bird in question on 26 August 1972. It was flushed at very close range and then watched through 10 x 50 binoculars for several minutes at a distance of about 100 feet. All field marks were noted as the owl bobbed up and down while scolding the observer. At the point where the owl flushed, there was a horizontal section of abandoned dredge pipe which lay beneath a small dune so that both ends of the pipe were exposed. Around the pipe ends were many footprints, so it appeared that the dredge pipe was the owl's burrow.

Fussell found the owl again on 2 September 1972, and it was shown to Harry and Edmund LeGrand on the following day. It has not been seen on subsequent visits.

These observations represent the second record of the Burrowing Owl in North Carolina. The first record was made at Salvo on the Outer Banks where an individual was present from about 14 November 1966 until 14 February 1967 when it was collected by Paul Sykes (in press, *Auk*, 91). That bird was found to be *Speotyto cunicularia floridiana*, the race resident in Florida. Because the Ft. Macon bird was not collected or captured, its subspecies remains unknown.



The Burrowing Owl collected by Sykes near Salvo in February 1967 was flushed from the hole shown above. The burrow appeared to be an enlarged ghost crab excavation. (Photo by Fred L. Johns)