

ONGOING SURVEYING FOR FLAMMULATED OWLS IN MONTANA VIA CITIZEN SCIENTISTS AND TECHNICIANS

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Flammulated owl (*Otus flammeolus*) populations in the Intermountain West may be declining due to habitat alterations, yet their secretive nature and scattered distribution have made monitoring difficult. In 2005 the Avian Science Center (ASC) and the Northern Region of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) initiated the first-ever Region-wide survey for flammulated owls in lower elevation, dry forest types of Montana and northern Idaho. Sampling methods using GIS modeling proved effective, and we now have a clearer understanding of owl distributions both east and west of the Divide. However, a long-term monitoring program using an established protocol is needed to understand habitat associations and population trends. A citizen-science approach has potential to provide a cost-effective means of collecting population data across a large area over time, and flammulated owl surveys are particularly appropriate for citizen monitoring because identification is straight forward, equipment is simple and inexpensive, and the public has a keen interest in both hearing owls and contributing to valuable science. In 2007 we initiated a successful pilot project with the help of volunteers from local Audubon groups who “adopted” survey route we plan to expand this monitoring in 2008. I will highlight the successes and challenge of a citizen science approach and discuss how our future surveys will draw on strengths of the approach together with a program using paid USFS technicians. Ultimately our goal is to better assess the habitat association of these owls particularly in the wildland urban interface.