

MEXICAN SPOTTED OWL

Strix occidentalis lucida (Threatened Colorado and Federally)



Mexican spotted owls have a large geographic range from the southwest United States into Mexico.

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THE MEXICAN SPOTTED OWL is one of three subspecies of spotted owls occurring in the United States and one of nine species of owls that inhabit Colorado. The other subspecies of spotted owls are the northern and California spotted owls.

They are large owls, about 17 inches tall, with dark eyes. They derive their name from white spotting on their heads, backs and underparts.

The Mexican spotted owl has the largest geographic range of the three subspecies, ranging from the southwest United States and into Mexico. In Colorado they occur in the lower elevation forests mostly in deeply incised, rocky canyons in southern Colorado and along the Front Range. Central Arizona and New Mexico are considered their core range and where the largest popula-

tions occur. They prefer complex forest structures or rocky canyons that contain uneven-aged, multi-level and old-aged, thick forests. They eat a variety of prey including small- to medium-sized rodents, such as woodrats, mice and voles. They will also feed on bats, birds, lizards and snakes and even spiders.

The two primary reasons for listing the owls as federally threatened species in 1993 were the alteration of its habitat as a result of logging and the potential danger of catastrophic wildfire to their habitat. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service designated critical habitat for the owl in 2001.

The highest number of owls ever counted in the state was 20, with seven breeding pairs in 1993. The owl's extremely low numbers, exacting habitat requirements and low productivity makes them susceptible to extirpation from the state.