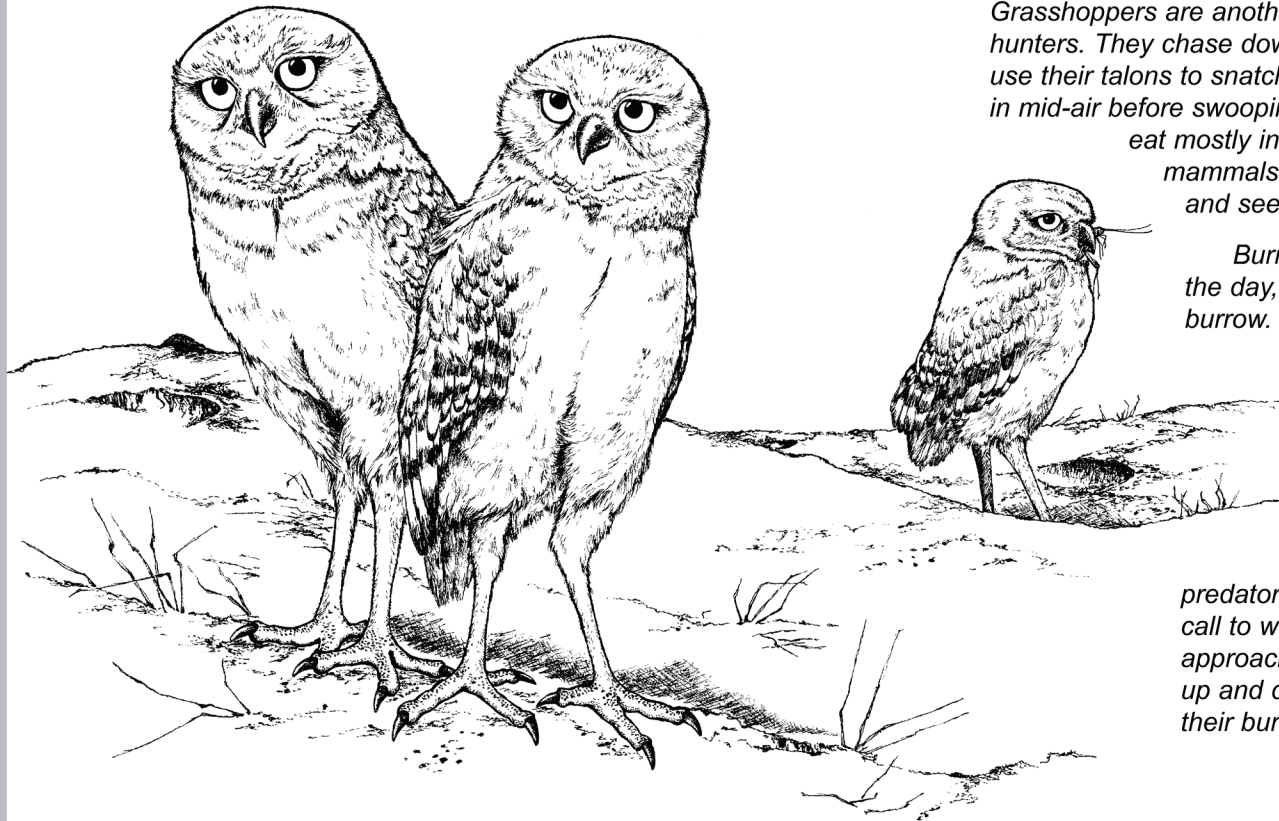


# The Underground Owls

*They are so un-owl like in so many ways. Burrowing owls are the only owls that nest below ground and stay active during the day. Instead of living in wooded areas, these owls prefer open areas with low vegetation. Most owls are solitary creatures, but these little owls hang out in groups in prairie dog towns.*

*Even the burrowing owls' body design is different. They have long legs and short tails—exactly the opposite of other species of owl. Unlike most owls in which the female is larger than the male, the sexes of the burrowing owl are either the same size or the female is smaller.*



*Burrowing owls often mate for life. Pairs arrive in Colorado in late March or April to breed. Burrowing owls can dig their own burrows in sandy soil, but prairie dog holes make perfect homes. The vacant holes have chambers for nesting and mounds for perching. Their prairie dog neighbors keep the vegetation close-cropped so that the owls have a clear view of approaching predators.*

*If the selected burrow is too small, the owls enlarge it by kicking out dirt with their feet. Then, the pair lines the nest with dry leaves and grass and twigs. Burrowing owls then collect mammal dung and put it in and around the burrow. The poop attracts dung beetles, a favorite food. Grasshoppers are another favorite. Burrowing owls are exceptional hunters. They chase down grasshoppers and beetles on the ground, or use their talons to snatch the insects out of the air. They can also hover in mid-air before swooping down on unsuspecting prey. Burrowing owls eat mostly insects during the day, but switch to eating small mammals at night. Unlike other owls, they also eat fruits and seeds, especially the fruit of prickly pear cactus.*

*Burrowing owls are entertaining to watch. During the day, they stand in groups at the mouth of the burrow. They bob their heads to express excitement or distress. Burrowing owls look even more comical in flight. They fly as if they are navigating an invisible obstacle course.*

*Burrowing owls are very vocal, and have a wide range of different calls. Young owls hiss like a rattlesnake when cornered by coyote, badger, or other predator. Adults give a short, low-level “chuck” call to warn of approaching danger. When approached too closely, owls will bob up and down and finally dive into their burrow rather than take flight.*

