

Project WAFLS Short-eared Owl Identification Guide (Guide Version: 2019a)

The following provides some helpful hints for use in the observation and identification of Short-eared Owls. It is not intended to be a comprehensive resource, so please refer to field guides and other online resources to assist.

We would love for all of our observations to look just like this...



However, I can virtually guarantee, that no more than one of us will have this clear of a view of the bird!

Short-eared Owl Identification (Wiggins et al. 2006)

- Medium-sized owl.
- Mostly mottled brown and buff (resembles dried grasses).
- Facial disk gray/white, orbits black, eyes yellow, bill black
- Chest pale with thin streaks.
- Head large and round, can have very small ear tufts, but seldom seen.
- Large buff wing patch on outer wing visible in flight.
- Dark crescent-shaped, carpal patches on the under wing (attribute shared with Long-eared Owl)
- Broad, elliptical wings
- Flies close to ground with characteristic floppy flight, described as “moth-like” and buoyant with slow, deliberate wing beats.
- Perches on shrubs, rocks, fences, power poles, power lines, and even on the ground.

More online information:

- <http://www.beautyofbirds.com/shortearedowls.html>
- [http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Short-eared Owl/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Short-eared_Owl/id)
- <http://www.hawkwatch.org/learn/factsheets/item/820-short-eared-owl>



Short-eared Owl Videos

If you have internet access, here are some videos which will help in identifying the flight-style and courtship flights. Note the floppy moth-like flight style.

Six videos including courtship flight

<http://www.arkive.org/short-eared-owl/asio-flammeus/video-06.html>

Owl expert Denver Holt (Owl Research Institute, describing courtship – Must See!)

<http://vimeo.com/25137146>

Courtship flight video by 2015 Short-eared Owl survey volunteer Bryce Robinson

<http://ornithologi.com/2015/04/25/short-eared-owl-wing-clap-flight-display/>

Courtship flight by Utah SEOW program lead Neil Paprocki

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-YKEmTvEQE>

Not Short-eared Owls

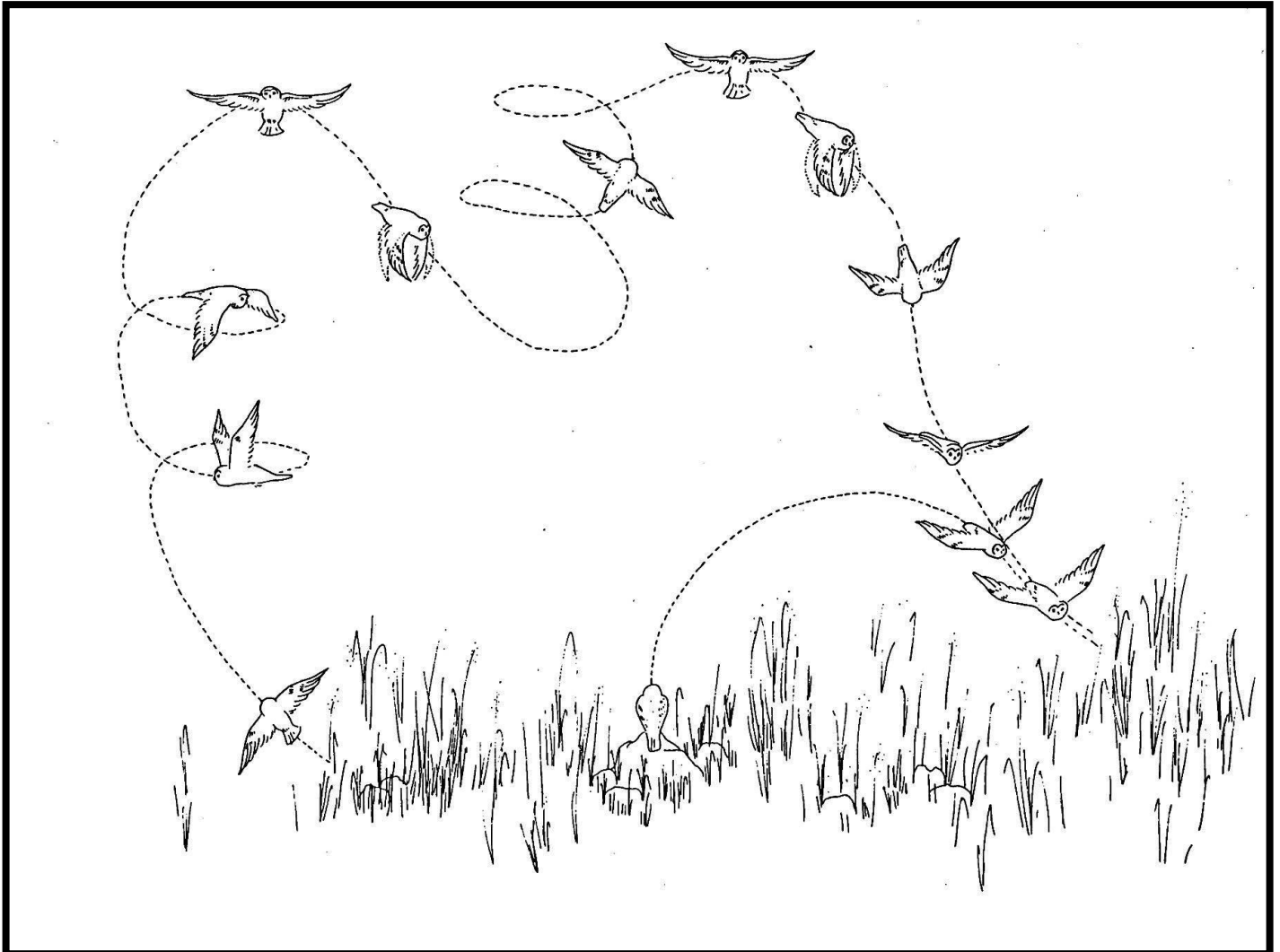
- Similar Species:
 - Long-eared Owl – Rufous facial disk, ear tufts often seen, more streaks on breast, similar flight style to Short-eared Owl, has dark crescent-shaped, carpal patches similar to Short-eared Owl.
 - Northern Harrier – similar foraging sites and style, longer narrower wings, longer tail, smaller head and powerful direct flight and rocking glide.
 - Great Horned Owl – Larger, rufous facial disk, heavily barred breast, powerful direct flight and glide.
 - Barn Owl – Medium-sized owl with a white heart-shaped face. Gray and cinnamon above and white below. Some have cinnamon colored and spotted breasts.



Long-eared Owl, Northern Harrier, and Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl (©Hiroshi Kano, Robert Miller, Robert Miller, Darren Clark/Macaulay Library at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (ML46140501)).

Courtship flight

We hope to observe the courtship flight of the Short-eared Owl. Our surveys are scheduled to coincide with the courtship season and this flight display is the most conspicuous behavior of this species. The general pattern is presented in this illustration. Note that this flight may be 500 feet above the ground. The owl will often hoot and clap wings during this flight.



Courtship flight display of male Short-eared Owl (Wiggins et al. 2006).



Short-eared Owl perched on sagebrush, Rogerson, Idaho (© Robert Miller).

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU for contributing to this project!

Wiggins, D. A., D. W. Holt and S. M. Leasure. 2006. Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology; Retrieved from the Birds of North America Online: <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna/species/062>