

CACTUS FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL
(Glaucidium brasilianum cactorum)

STATUS: Protected from direct take of individuals and nests/eggs by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703 – 712; 40 Stat.755), as amended, and Arizona state law under Title 17 (A.R.S. Title 17).

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: A small reddish-brown, to somewhat grayish, owl with a cream-colored belly streaked with reddish-brown. Males average 62 g (2.2 oz) and females average 75 g (2.6 oz). Length is approximately 17 cm (6.75 in), including tail. The eyes are yellow, the crown is lightly streaked, and there are no ear tufts. Paired black spots on the back of head suggest “eyes”. The tail is long for an owl and reddish-brown in color with dark bars. The pygmy-owl is non-migratory throughout its range. Their diet includes other birds, lizards, insects, and small mammals.

HABITAT: The pygmy-owl has been found in riverbottom woodlands and palo verde-cacti-mixed scrub associations of the Sonoran desert. In central and southern Arizona, the pygmy-owl is currently found primarily in Sonoran desertscrub vegetation, with some locations in riparian drainages and woodlands within semi-desert grassland vegetation communities. The cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl nests in cavities, primarily in saguaro cacti, but they will also use tree cavities. Pygmy-owls are found below 1,200 m (4,000 ft) in elevation.

RANGE: Historical: The subspecies is geographically isolated into eastern and western populations. The western population extends from lowland central Arizona south through western Mexico, to the States of Colima and Michoacan, Mexico. The eastern population is distributed from southern Texas south through the States of Tamaulipas and Nuevo Leon, Mexico. The historical range in Arizona extends north from the U.S-Mexico border to New River, to the Gila Box (east) and to the Cabeza Prieta Mountains (west). Historically, the pygmy-owl was documented in Maricopa, Yuma, Santa Cruz, Graham, Greenlee, Pima, Pinal, Gila, and Cochise Counties, Arizona.

Current: Since 1993, when formal pygmy-owl surveys using a protocol were initiated, the documented U.S. distribution of pygmy-owls has been limited to Pima and Pinal counties.

REASONS FOR DECLINE/VULNERABILITY: The species is threatened by the destruction, modification, and curtailment of its habitat and range; competition with and predation by other raptors; and, potentially, inbreeding and reduced genetic diversity due to increasingly fragmented and small isolated populations, particularly within the northern portion of its range.

LAND MANAGEMENT/OWNERSHIP: In Arizona: U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, State of Arizona, Tribal, military and private.

NOTES: Listed as a Species of Special Concern by the State of Arizona.

CURRENT STATUS: The pygmy-owl was listed in the Arizona portion of its range as an endangered species in 1997 ([62 FR 10730](#)). Following a long history of litigation, the Service removed the pygmy-owl from the list of threatened and endangered species in 2006 ([71 FR 19425](#)). Following delisting, the Center for Biological Diversity and Defenders of Wildlife submitted a new petition to the Service to once again list the pygmy-owl as threatened or endangered both within and outside Arizona. The petition is primarily based on new information on the genetics and taxonomy of the pygmy-owl, and seeks protection in both the United States and Mexico. The Service issued a 90-day finding on the petition, finding that the petition was valid and presented substantial information that listing of the pygmy-owl may be warranted ([73 FR 31418](#)), and is currently working on a 12-month status review of the pygmy-owl to determine if listing is warranted.

The number of locations currently known to be occupied by pygmy-owls in Arizona remains limited. Due to the extremely low pygmy-owl population numbers in Arizona, the Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department initiated a research program in 2006 to investigate the feasibility of a captive breeding program to augment existing pygmy-owl populations. Initial results related to housing and breeding pygmy-owls in captivity have been promising. The Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department remain committed to the conservation of the pygmy-owl and continue to conduct and support research related to pygmy-owls in both the United States and Mexico.