

Wildlife Viewfinder Guide: Extreme makeover - burrow edition

by Tim Herd

Fresh from its winter sojourn in Central America, the burrowing owl is now actively renovating its new digs. Its twisting and turning underground lair may have originally housed a prairie dog, tortoise, ground squirrel, rabbit, skunk, armadillo or even a badger. But the tunnels need a special owl touch - an insulative lining of shredded, dried horse manure or cattle dung. The owl's taste in decor may seem unique and bird-brained, but it is not foolish: Such architectural ambience is a welcome mat for dung beetles, whose tasty in-house presence - along with other ground-dwelling insects - is relished by the new residents. With the extreme makeover complete, in they move. Safely ensconced underground, the female incubates four-10 eggs for about four weeks while her partner supplements her buggy diet with fresh meats from aboveground. Watch as he forages for his family by chasing down scorpions, reptiles, birds and small mammals and catching them with his feet. When not busy foraging, he is often spotted guarding his sweet domicile from a perch on the ground or a low fence post.

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