

Nature Notes

Northern Pygmy Owl



Have you ever heard a series of slow, low "too, too, too" when out for a walk in the Nature Park? If so, you might have been listening to the call of the small, only 17 cm high, of the Northern Pygmy Owl. This uncommon owl with bright yellow eyes hoots to establish his territory and can usually be heard at first or last light throughout the year.



Photo: Kent Goodwin - Edge Trail, Kimberley Nature Park

Most years, someone does report hearing the Northern Pygmy Owl in the park but it is rarely seen. This diurnal owl likes to roost in thickets where it is safe from predators such as larger birds of prey or weasels. While hunting during the day, they occasionally are seen perched in open areas, sitting and waiting before swooping down to catch a vole or young rabbit or other small animal.

Northern Pygmy Owls nest almost entirely in old woodpecker cavities of dead coniferous or deciduous trees. Although solitary for most of the year, males and females have a mating trill they call to

attract each other. The female will lay an average of 3 or 4 eggs in April and incubate them for around 28 days. About a month later, the young fledge the nest and begin their hunting lessons!

Only 5 nests for Northern Pygmy Owls have been found in British Columbia, none of them in the Kootenays. However, they are expected to breed here. When in the Nature Park, watch and listen. You might get the breeding record of this owl in our area!

Visit www.rockies.net/kimberley/naturepark for a hard copy or more information about Nature Park events.