



Marin Audubon Society

P.O. Box 599 | MILL VALLEY, CA 94942-0599 | MARINAUDUBON.ORG

February 14th, 2023

NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL ADVISORY

Dear Property Owner/Occupant:

You are receiving this letter because your property is within a 1/4 mile of a Northern Spotted Owl nest or roost site. The site was confirmed through survey results and observations from Marin Water, formerly Marin Municipal Water District (MMWD), the Marin County Open Space District (MCOSD), Point Blue Conservation Science, and others.



The Northern Spotted Owl is listed as 'Threatened' under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). Because of this, it is afforded extra protections from noise and habitat disturbances during its nesting season. Activities or acts that result in the disturbance, harassment or death of Northern Spotted Owls are considered a **federal and state offense**.

In Marin County, the Northern Spotted Owl's nesting season is typically considered from **February 1 to July 31**. Organizations, including MCOSD and Marin Water, use these dates during surveys and to inform work windows. These dates can vary depending on an individual nesting site and current nesting activity.

Be advised that loud activities negatively impact the Northern Spotted Owl if they occur too close to its nest. Any activity within a 1/4 mile radius is considered close to the nest. Examples of work that can impact the Northern Spotted Owl include home construction projects, tree work, and roof repairs. Playing loud outdoor music during the day and night can also interfere with the owl's ability to successfully hunt prey. Off leash dogs and free roaming cats can attack and kill an owl (recently fledged young are particularly vulnerable because they are often on the ground). Marin Audubon Society recommends that residents minimize activities that rise above ambient background noise levels until the end of the nesting season on **July 31**.

If you have scheduled activity on your property before **July 31** that you believe may rise above this noise/disturbance level, a biological monitor should be contacted to discuss your project and determine the nesting status for the site in your neighborhood. Many sites in Marin are already monitored, and biologists can share this data with the consultant. Marin Audubon Society does not publish the specific locations of Spotted Owl nests to avoid disturbance from birders, photographers, and other interested parties. Marin Audubon Society can put you in contact with a biological consultant familiar with California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) requirements should you require specific information as you consider the impact of your activity (see our website link below).

Due to the sensitivity around this threatened species, do not post photos and/or location information on social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, NextDoor, etc.). Sharing Northern Spotted Owl location information with neighbors, friends and others can attract people to the nest site, which can cause added stress to nesting owls and their offspring. People loitering, especially in large groups, can be considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act, which may result in a fine. It is always best to keep any nesting bird or owl's location to yourself, especially a species listed under the ESA and CESA.

If you have any questions regarding impacts to Northern Spotted Owl and potential permitting requirements, please contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife - Bay Delta Region at (707) 428-2002 or by email at AskBDR@wildlife.ca.gov

You can obtain more information on the Northern Spotted Owl's nesting activities and potential noise disturbance, or submit Northern Spotted Owl observations, at the CDFW website: wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Birds/Northern-Spotted-Owl and email: owlobs@wildlife.ca.gov (for owl sightings)

For general information regarding the Northern Spotted owl, or if you'd like to report a sighting, please contact: **Elyse Omernick** - outreach@marinaudubon.org

A fact sheet with more information on the Northern Spotted Owl and an invasive competitor, the Barred Owl, is enclosed. Visit Marin Audubon's website for a list of qualified biologists at:

Marin Audubon Society's Northern Spotted Owl Docent Program:

Marin Audubon Society is excited to announce the second year of our Northern Spotted Owl Docent Program. We partnered with the Marin County Open Space Ranger team to create this program last year, and are looking for additional docents to support this important effort. There are a few NSO activity centers within Marin County that are more well known, and the presence of docents and rangers at these centers helps keep the owls safe. Our goal for this program is to further educate our community when people come across an NSO on a trail, how to ethically observe them, and to work with the Marin County Open Space ranger team when unethical behavior needs to be reported.

If you are interested in becoming a docent, please contact **Elyse Omernick** - outreach@marinaudubon.org

marinaudubon.org/conservation/northern-spotted-owl/

Thank you for doing your part to protect these very special and rare creatures that share life in the forests around our homes and in adjacent open spaces.

Elyse Omernick & Barbara Salzman
Marin Audubon Society - Conservation
conservation@marinaudubon.org

THE NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL - "NSO" (*Strix occidentalis caurina*)

The Northern Spotted owl is a threatened species, protected both by the state and federal governments under the Endangered Species Act and the California Endangered Species Act. Marin County, the Northern Spotted Owl's most southern range, supports one of the last stable populations in the world.

The Northern Spotted Owl is a medium-sized, dark brown owl with a barred tail, white spots on the head and breast, and dark brown eyes surrounded by a prominent facial disk (the feathers surrounding the owl's eyes). Marin County's Northern Spotted Owl prefers habitat made up of mature Coastal Redwood, Douglas Fir, and California Bay Laurel. The NSO is a nocturnal owl, meaning it is awake during the night, and sleeps during the day.



Nesting season runs from **February 1st - July 31st** each year. This is a critical time in which the nesting pair will choose their nesting site, mate and hopefully raise their young.

How Can We Protect the Northern Spotted Owl?

- Avoid loud noises during nesting season - This includes construction work, tree work, outdoor music (during day & night), and gas powered leaf blowers.
- Do not shout or make loud noises when you are in close proximity to a nesting site.
- Do not hoot at or play recordings of Spotted Owls. This is considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act.
- Never use flash photography as the flash can disorient owls.
- Always stay on marked trails.
- Keep dogs on a leash at all times (owl babies often perch on the ground shortly after leaving the nest).
- Keep your cats indoors *An estimated 764 million birds are killed each year in the US & Canada by domesticated cats.
- If you come across a Northern Spotted Owl, observe it from a distance and keep your visits short. Even though the owls appear tame, our presence, especially when loitering in groups, can interrupt their normal activities, such as roosting, feeding their young, and protecting themselves and their offspring from predators.
- Never use rodenticides. Poisoned rodents can be eaten by predators, including owls, and can make them sick or kill them.

Northern Spotted Owls and Barred Owls look quite similar. The easiest way to differentiate the two species is by the feather pattern on their chest. The **NSO (left image)** has a spotted brown and white pattern, while the **Barred Owl (right image)** has a barred brown and white pattern. Please note the below photos which clearly illustrate these differences. Should you see what you believe is a Barred Owl, we ask that you report it to the below agencies. Provide a description and the location, and if possible, provide a photo and/or recording.



Sharing NSO location information on social media platforms such as NextDoor, Facebook and Instagram, can lead to groups of people disturbing the owls. While sharing photos with friends and family is usually harmless, **never share location information.**

Loitering near NSO nesting or roosting sites, especially in large groups, can stress the owls and can be considered harassment under the Endangered Species Act. Harrassing NSO could result in criminal citations and fines.



Report NSO and Barred Owl sightings to owlobs@wildlife.ca.gov

For questions about project impacts to NSO, please contact:

Amanda Culpepper - Environmental Scientist - California Department of Fish & Wildlife
(707) 428-2075 / amanda.culpepper@wildlife.ca.gov

Visit: marinaudubon.org/conservation/northern-spotted-owl



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March 1st, 2022

NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL ADVISORY

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If you have any questions regarding impacts to Northern Spotted Owl and potential permitting requirements, please contact **Amanda (Mandy) Culpepper** with CDFW by email at **amanda.culpepper@wildlife.ca.gov**

You can obtain more information on the Northern Spotted Owl's nesting activities and potential noise disturbance, or submit Northern Spotted Owl observations, at the CDFW website: **wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Birds/Northern-Spotted-Owl** and email:

owlobs@wildlife.ca.gov (for owl sightings)

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