

# Great gray owls finding a home in Placerville

By Tom Knudson, Sacramento Bee

Flip through a field guide to western birds and you'll discover the great gray owl occupies the narrowest of ecological niches in California: dense conifer forests next to moist mountain meadows.

But lately, the elusive owl has been spotted swooping through much different terrain: the sun-baked Sierra Nevada foothills where – surprisingly enough – it is thriving on land owned by the state's largest timber company, Sierra Pacific Industries.

The bird's discovery south of Placerville has startled wildlife biologists and bird-watchers who have long considered the exceedingly rare, brownish-gray owl to be a stalwart of higher elevations, a winged icon of the wilderness.

"It's pretty exciting they are being found this low," said Graham Chisholm, executive director of Audubon California. "It shows the resilience of these birds."

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