

EASTERN SCREECH OWL

Megascops asio

The Eastern Screech Owl has the broadest ecological niche of any owl in its range; east of the Rocky Mountain and northeastern Mexico. They are found in both rural and urban habitats.



Photo by: Sarah

The Eastern Screech Owl has three different color morphs; gray, red and brown. No other North American owl has such distinctive plumage differences. They are a small owl only about 6-10 inches tall, with a wingspan of 19-24 inches and weigh about 4-9 ounces. They have feathered ear tufts,

yellow eyes, greenish bill, and has toe feathers. Sexes are alike in plumage with female being larger. Immature owl is like the adult. Owls are nocturnal (coming out at night).



Photo by: Toni O'Neil

Eastern Screech Owls are monogamous and polygynous, forming pairs of same-age individuals in small territories around alternative nest sites. Nesting occurs between January and April. Screech owl lay eggs over a period of days to more than a week and generally does not begin full-time incubation until the last egg is laid. As a result eggs laid first also develop and hatch first. Larger broods may vary in development in 1-8 days behind nest mates. Two to Seven eggs, usually 3-4, are laid in a large nest cavity. They are incubated 26-34 days, with an average of 30. The female incubates the eggs and brood the young while the male guards the nest cavity and feed the female. They are born with white down and eyes closed. The young leave the nest at about 28 days

of age and remain with the parents until they are about 8-10 week old. Both parents feed the young during this time.

Unlike hawks, owls leave the nest before the can fly. We call it the hop-fly method. This means they get to the ground and hop maybe flying only two feet the first time. The second time four feet. Each time the distance gets longer. Within one to two weeks they are flying.

Only about 30-50% of the young survive the first year.

Eastern screech owls eat the most variety of diet of any North American owl. Foods include insects, crayfish, earthworms, songbirds, and rodents.

They are not migratory and often a pair may keep the same nest, in winter and summer. Females re-use successful nest sites. These owls are usually solitary, except during the mating season and during winters when mates share a winter nest. Males defend their territory. These owls mainly fly but also hop and walk on the ground when chasing prey.

Screech owls have an acute sense of hearing and vision, which help them locate prey in dim light. They use a variety of vocalizations. Nestlings and females call softly when in the nest. They are preyed on as adults and fledglings by larger owls, hawks, and other eastern screech owls. Raccoons,

opossums, and black rat snakes may also take eggs and nestling.

COOL FACTS

- The Eastern Screech Owl eats a variety of small animals. Two captive birds ate from ¼ to 1/3 their body weight in food each night, actually skipped a night and stored the food instead.
- Members of a pair or a family to keep in contact use the trilling song on one pitch, sometimes known as the Bounce Song. The descending Whinny is used in territory defense.
- Eastern Screech Owl pairs usually are monogamous and remain together for life. Some males, however, will mate with two different females. The second female may evict the first female, lay her eggs in the nest and incubate both clutches.
- The Eastern Screech Owl is known to eat a variety of songbirds, including the European Starling.

In any State, you can call your local Game & Inland Fisheries, local

Veterinarian, or animal shelter and they should have some phone numbers for local Wildlife Rehabilitators.

If you have any questions you may call Pearl Beamer, State & Federally licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator within the state of Virginia about wildlife. Pearl specializes in Raptors, Crows and Loons. 757-855-2922 (7am-7pm)



Photo by: Jean Soprano, NY

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“KOLA WAKON OF WILDLIFE”

Roughly translated it means “Sacred Friend of Wildlife”. This is what every Wildlife Rehabilitator, every person who rescues wildlife, everyone who transports and every Veterinarian that works with wildlife are to the wild kingdom.