



How to Help

Eastern Screech-Owls

The Eastern Screech-Owl is found east of the Rocky Mountains, where it is a permanent resident of both rural and urban habitats from south of the Canadian boreal forest to near the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico. It nests in tree cavities in wooded environments below about 5,000 feet, occupying deciduous and evergreen lowland forests to mountainside woodlands. Sometimes nesting in bird boxes, it is often the most common owl in most wooded suburban and urban habitats.

What Eastern Screech-Owls Need

Food: This owl forages for small animals and insects in the woodland understory, clearings, and edges. In urban and suburban settings it also forages over lawns, streets, and patios, sitting on a perch below the tree canopy and waiting for prey to appear. Most hunting is nocturnal, but Screech-Owls are often most active at dusk and dawn.

Nesting: Screech-Owls nest in a wide range of forested or wooded habitats with at least about 20 trees per acre, including suburban neighborhoods with large trees. They usually nest in cavities 13 to 20 feet off the ground but will go up to 65 feet high. Eastern Screech-Owls nest in high densities if cavities are available, within as few as 100 feet of other nest sites in suburbia and 600 feet in rural areas.

Shelter: These owls roost during the day in tree cavities or evergreen trees in winter, and at least 12 feet up on sheltered limbs of deciduous trees in summer.

Other: Birds drink and bathe in shallow water, possibly more than once during their daily cycle. Adults and fledglings habitually use suburban birdbaths, a behavior which may go largely undetected by humans because it generally occurs at night. May be susceptible to West Nile Virus infection, especially in mosquito-ridden suburban areas.

How You Can Help

- Plant large shade trees to provide hunting perches over open areas below.
- Maintain native shrubs or bushes to support an array of food sources for owls.
- Avoid using lawn and other pesticides that kill large insects that owls eat and that may directly poison the birds.
- Plant native shade trees to provide potential nesting sites for owls.
- If safety allows, protect snags or dead limbs—especially those already excavated by woodpeckers.
- Mount nest boxes 10 to 20 feet high in large trees. Box interior should measure at least 8 x 8 inches wide and 12 to 15 inches deep, with a 3 inch entrance hole.
- Install additional roost boxes, with larger entrance holes, for winter roosting.
- Plant an evergreen tree with dense branches, and large shade trees for additional roosting sites.
- Provide a bird bath or shallow pond, and keep water clean and free of mosquito larvae.