



Screech Owl

(*Otus asio*)

DID YOU KNOW:

Eastern Screech Owls occur in different colors. Just as there are palomino, black and chestnut horses, there are gray, brown and red screech owls. Both male and female owls share these colors. In fact, brothers and sisters from the same

clutches may be different colors!

EATING HABITS:

Screech owls hunt at night using their excellent night vision and hearing. They stalk along the ground hunting for insects, toads and lizards. They wade into water to catch fish, crawdads and frogs. They even grab large flying insects and bats while in flight. Although their favorite food is mice, they are not choosy.

THE YOUNG:

Screech owls do not make a nest. In April, the mom owl lays four to five eggs in a hole in a tree or in an abandoned building. She incubates the eggs for three weeks. The dad owl brings food to her every night. The owlets leave the nest at 3 1/2 weeks of age but stay with their parents until early fall.



HABITAT (HOME):

Screech owls thrive in open woodlands next to fields, marshes or meadows. Loss of this habitat is causing a decline in owl populations. Moving into harsher habitats, young owls have a hard time surviving. They starve, get hit by cars or become prey to Great Horned Owls.

DEFENSIVE HABITS:

Screech owls are small, standing only 10 inches tall and weighing only 7 ounces. But they fight like wildcats in defense of their nest. When facing an enemy, a screech owl makes itself seem big by widely opening its yellow eyes, standing as tall as possible, and fluffing out its feathers. If the enemy does not turn tail and run, the little owl flips onto its back and digs its talons into the enemy's face.

UNUSUAL FACTS:

- Screech owls do not screech. They have two calls, a whinny and a soft, low trill. The whinny is used to defend territory. Members of a pair or a family keep in contact using the low trill, called the Bounce Song.
- The adult owls communicate with each other when they set up their breeding territory and to strengthen their pair bond.
- Eastern Screech owls are usually monogamous and remain together for life.
- Eastern Screech-Owls readily accept nest boxes; consider putting one up to attract a breeding pair. Make sure you put it up well before breeding season. Attach a guard to keep predators from raiding eggs and young.
- Like most raptors, male Eastern Screech-Owls are smaller than females, and are more agile fliers and hunters. The female doesn't hunt while on the nest; she and the chicks depend on food brought them by the male.
- Eastern Screech-Owls of the suburbs may fledge more young than their rural counterparts, probably because their predators are scarcer in the suburbs.