

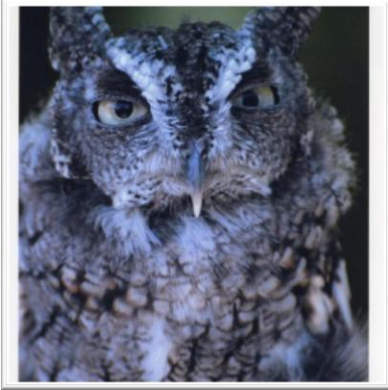
Eastern Screech Owl

Scientific Name: *Megascops asio*

Class: Aves

Order: Strigiformes

Family: Strigidae



Their length is 7 to 10 inches, and the wingspan is 18 to 24 inches. Females are larger than males. There are two distinct color phases: gray and rufous. In the rufous phase they are fox-red above and whitish below with rufous crossbars and dark vertical streaks, and rufous facial disks. In the gray phase they are gray or gray-brown above, darker on the crown, heavily streaked and crossbarred, with the underparts whitish. In both phases the striping and bars make a perfect imitation of tree bark.

Range

North America

Habitat

Open woodlands, forest clearings, old orchards, suburban parklands

Gestation

Incubation: About 30 days

Litter

Clutch: 2 to 6; usually 4. Larger and older females lay larger clutches.

Behavior

They are strictly nocturnal. They do not migrate. Screech owls are exceptional hunters. The only time they screech is during the brief period when their babies have just left the nest and are beginning to fly. Instead, they trill, often in duet form, beginning and ending in perfect synchronism. Sometimes the trill is pitched at harmonic intervals of a third or a fifth.

Reproduction

Nests are in natural tree cavities, old woodpecker holes, or man-made nesting boxes. Nests may be as high as 60 feet above the ground, or as low as 4 feet. The female is in charge of incubation and brooding. The male supplies all the food to the female during this period. Females deliberately choose very small males, and mate for life. Although the female may sacrifice the eggs if attacked, she will vigorously defend the fledglings. Screech owls defend their young so strongly that they have earned the description, "feathered wild cats".

Wild Diet

Mainly insects. During winter months birds, small mammals, and reptiles are consumed.