

# Eastern Screech-Owl (*Megascops asio*)

**Description:** Small, with short "ear" tufts that may be raised or flattened, changing appearance of head shape. Overall color varies as they can be commonly gray, reddish, or brown. Red and gray individuals occur across the range of the Eastern Screech-Owl, with about one-third of all individuals being red. Rufous owls are more common in the East, with fewer than 15% red at the western edge of the range. Base of bill yellow green. Their call is a tremulous, descending wail; soft purrs and trills.

**Trends:** Declining

**Habitat:** Woodlands, farm groves, shade trees. Generally favors deciduous or mixed woods, but may be found in any habitat having some open ground and some large trees, from forest to isolated groves to suburban yards. May be absent from some areas because of lack of dead snags with suitable nesting holes. Common east of the Rockies in woods, suburbs, and parks, the Eastern Screech-Owl is found wherever trees are, and they're even willing to nest in backyard nest boxes. These supremely camouflaged birds hide out in nooks and tree crannies through the day, so train your ears and listen for them at night.

**Ways You can help with Conservation:** Habitat fragmentation is an issue in declining numbers locally.

*Protect large, mature trees and snags for use as nesting and roosting habitat.* Retaining large, mature trees and snags, even if they appear partially dead, provides the necessary natural cavities for nesting and daytime roosting. These trees are far more valuable to a screech owl pair than a newly planted sapling.

*Don't use rodenticides which are dangerous to all owls, hawks, and raptors.* When rodents are poisoned, they often become less fearful, making them easy prey for raptors which then become poisoned after eating the rodent. Screech owls primarily eat large insects and small rodents so switching to non-toxic pest control methods, such as snap traps or exclusion, removes the risk of secondary poisoning.

*Reduce outdoor light pollution by turning off outdoor lighting or using motion sensor lights.*

Excessive light can interfere with the owls' nocturnal hunting patterns.

*Mitigate the risk of window and vehicle collisions in suburban settings.* Applying bird friendly film to large windows can break up reflective surfaces, making the glass more visible to a flying owl. These collective, local efforts help ensure that screech owl populations remain stable and continue to thrive in our shared environments.

*Install a screech owl box in appropriate habitat and use a predator baffle.* Eastern Screech-Owls cannot create their own cavities and rely on existing cavities in older trees. New Hope Bird Alliance [sells screech owl nest boxes](#). It is important to mount these 10 to 30 feet high

on a tree trunk near a woodland edge. Adding wood shavings or leaves to the bottom of the box simulates the floor of a natural cavity and encourages occupancy. Boxes should not be cleaned out.



*Eastern Screech-Owl photo by Susan Kellett*



*Gray version Screech-Owl by Jen StLouis*