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EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops asio*)



Photo by Kristi Overgaard

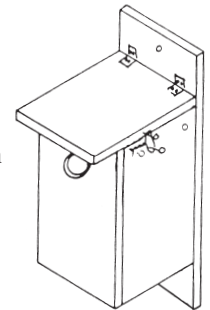
Identifying Marks: Wingspan 21 inches; length 8.5 inches. This is the only small eastern owl with ear tufts. The surface of the upper wings is marked with white spots. This owl comes in different colors, ranging from red to gray.

Habitat: Forests and woodlands across the eastern half of the U.S. Also found in wooded cities and suburbs.

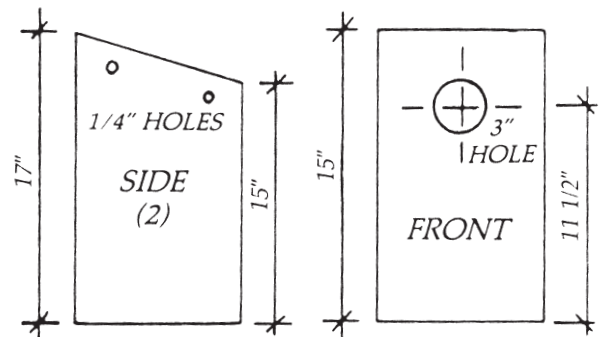
Nest: Natural tree cavities such as woodpecker holes. Screech-owls will also use nest boxes. Parts for one can be cut from a single 1" X 10" X 8' rough-sawn board (see below). The box should be filled with 3" of wood shavings or chips and placed at least 10 feet high on a tree or pole. Squirrels may move in unless the box is mounted on a pole with a predator guard. Hinge the roof if you plan on cleaning the box. Keep in mind that raptors have used uncleaned nest boxes and cavities for years in a row.

Diet: This raptor that will consume whatever prey is readily available including moths, beetles, earthworms, cicadas, crayfish, spiders, lizards, mice, rats, bats, chipmunks, toads, doves, jays, robins, and sparrows.

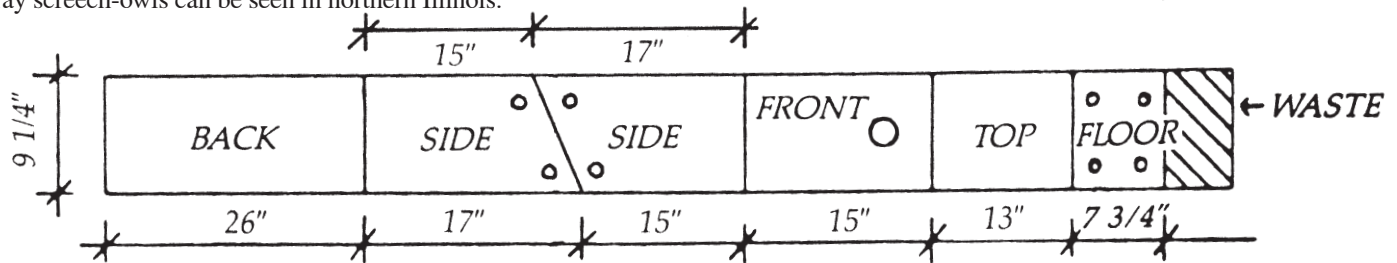
Voice: A descending quavering whinny or whistle. Also, a 3-6 second soft tremolo or trilling sound.



Nest Box



Comments: Red screech-owls are more common in the moist and warm conditions found in the south and east portions of the species' range. Gray birds rule the roost in the colder north and drier west areas of its range. Both red and gray screech-owls can be seen in northern Illinois.



Day and Night Shifts



Male American kestrel

Job Openings

If a habitat is home to an abundance of prey, it will have openings for both nocturnal and diurnal (daytime) raptors. In this case, the similarly-sized American kestrel hunts mice during the day that the screech-owl hunts at night. Other examples of this sunrise/sunset job switch include:

Day

- Broad-winged Hawk
- Northern Harrier
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk

Night

- Long-eared Owl
- Short-eared Owl
- Barred Owl
- Great Horned Owl