



WESTERN SCREECH OWL

Strigiformes
Family: Strigidae
Genus: *Megascops*
Species: *kennicottii*



Range: Resident from southeastern Alaska and British Columbia south into Mexican and East throughout the U.S. Rockies.

Habitat: Temperate forests, subtropical and tropical montane forests, shrubland, desert, rural fields

Niche: Nocturnal, arboreal, carnivorous

Wild diet: small mammals, and birds, and large insects

Zoo diet:

Life Span: (Wild) 1 – 8 years

(Captivity) longest recorded 19 years

Sexual dimorphism: Females are larger than the males

Location in SF Zoo:

APPEARANCE & PHYSICAL ADAPTATIONS:

The Western Screech Owl is a small, woodland owl and is one of the west's more common owls at lower elevations. This species is a squat-looking owl that sits erect, with their plumage fluffed out, with the feet and legs obscured, and distinct ear tufts raised. Their irises are bright yellow and the bill is gray to black, with tufts of bristly feathers around its base. The whitish facial disk is bordered by black. The toes are yellow. Plumage is mainly mottled gray, which resembles a furrowed tree bark pattern and makes excellent camouflage. When threatened, the bird stretches its body and tightens its feathers in order to look like a branch stub to avoid detection but will take flight when it knows it has been detected. Their feet and toes are feathered in northern populations but bristled in southern deserts.

Weight: 5.8 – 6.4 oz
Length: 7.5 – 10.0 in
Wingspan: 21 - 22 in

STATUS & CONSERVATION

Vulnerable to habitat loss because of urban development. Listed on CITES Appendix II. Listed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List.

COMMUNICATION AND OTHER BEHAVIOR

The screech owl's primary call is an accelerating series of short whistles, "hoo-hoo-hoo....", at an increasing tempo or a short then long trill falling slightly at end. It is given by the male during the mating and nesting seasons, but also during the autumn and winter. This call is primarily territorial in nature.

This species hunts mainly from a perch. They also capture flying insects on the wing. Small prey is usually swallowed whole on the spot, while larger prey is carried in the bill to a perch and then torn apart.

COURTSHIP AND YOUNG

During courtship males and females call to each other in a duet as they approach each other. When together they preen each other's heads and nibble at the other's beaks. Western Screech Owls nest almost exclusively in tree cavities. No nest material is added. The average clutch size tends to increase from south to north and from the coast inland. The eggs are laid every 1 to 2 days. The female incubates each egg as it is laid, thus the eggs hatch in sequence and young vary in size and age. This strategy allows the parents to raise all their young if food is plentiful or only the first few, if food is scarce. The incubation period is about 26 days and the fledging period about 35 days. Females incubate eggs and brood young while males bring food to the nest. Later the chicks are fed by both parents.

Incubation: 26 – 34 days	Sexual Maturity: 1 year
# of eggs: 3 - 7	Fledging: 29 – 35 days

MISCELLANEOUS

The Western Screech Owl is likely to be confused with the Eastern Screech Owl but can be distinguished by their bill color and calls. The Eastern Screech Owls have gray-green bills while Western Screech Owls have gray to black bills and their different calls. Until recently it was considered the same species as the Eastern Screech-Owl.

This owl is very aggressive when defending a nest site, and may attack humans.

Occasionally this species will take prey larger than itself, including cottontail rabbits and mallards.

Sources:

Handbook of the Birds of the World, Volume 5 © 1999 Lynx Edicions p 173

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/>

<http://www.allaboutbirds.org/>

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