

# Eastern Screech-Owl



Rufous



Grey

## Classification

**Kingdom:** Animalia  
**Phylum:** Chordata  
**Class:** Aves  
**Order:** Strigiformes  
**Family:** Strigidae  
**Genus:** *Megascops*  
**Species:** *asio*



## Range, Habitat, Conservation Status

- **Range:** Found throughout much of eastern North America, from the Rocky Mountains in the West to the Atlantic coast and from Florida and southern Texas in the south as far north as southern Canada.
- **Habitat:** Anywhere there is a healthy stand of trees, including deciduous or evergreen forests, wooded parks, urban areas, or riparian zones.
- **Conservation Status:** Least Concern

## Physical Characteristics

- **Body Length:** 6.3 to 9.8 inches (16-25 cm)
- **Wingspan:** 18.9 to 24.0 inches (48-61 cm)
- **Weight:** 4.3 to 8.6 ounces (121-244 g)
- **Lifespan:** Up to 14 years in the wild.
- **Identifying Traits:** Short, stocky bird with rounded wings and a short, square tail. It has pointed tufts on its head. There are two color morphs, mostly grey or mostly reddish-brown known as rufous. Patterned with complex bands and spots that give them excellent camouflage against tree bark. Eyes are yellow.

## Behaviors

- **Feeding:** Forages at dusk and at night. Hunts mostly by watching from a perch and then swooping down to take prey from the ground or from foliage. Eats mostly large insects and small rodents.
- **Breeding:** Breeding occurs from February through March and sometimes later.
- **Nesting:** Nest in holes and cavities, but never dig a cavity themselves. Thus, they depend on tree holes opened or enlarged by woodpeckers, fungus, rot, or squirrels.



- **Migration:** Not Migratory
- **Call:** A tremulous, descending wail; soft purrs and trills.

## Resident Bird(s)

**Name:** Marengo

- **Age:** Hatched in 2021
- **Sex:** Female
- **Background:** Attacked by cat, non-releasable due to injuries.
- **Unique Individual Traits:** Her favorite enrichment items are foraging boxes and new branches.

## Fun Facts!

- Despite the name, screech-owls do not screech, instead the voice of this species features whinnies and soft trills.
- Eastern Screech-Owls are mostly solitary. They are only in pairs during the breeding season.
- When threatened, they will stretch their body and tighten their feathers to look like a branch.
- Red and grey individuals occur across this species range. About 1/3 of Eastern Screech-Owls are red with them being more common in the East. Red owls have not been observed in southern Texas. This is where the "McCall's" Eastern Screech-Owl is found (south-central Texas and parts of northern Mexico). It is currently a subspecies that may in fact be a separate species as it is always gray and never gives the "whinny" call, however scientists have not yet identified it as a separate species.

## Importance

- Eastern Screech-Owls help to control the populations of potential pests, such as mice and some insects.

## Sources

- [https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Otus\\_asio/](https://animaldiversity.org/accounts/Otus_asio/)
- <https://peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/owls/eastern-screech-owl>
- <https://nationalzoo.si.edu/animals/eastern-screech-owl>
- <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/eastern-screech-owl>
- [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern\\_Screech-Owl/lifehistory](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Screech-Owl/lifehistory)