

# Western Screech-Owl

## Fact Sheet



### What is a Western Screech-Owl?

The Western Screech-Owl (*Otus kennicottii macfarlanei*) is a small, nocturnal owl that inhabits deciduous riparian woodlands in BC's southern interior. It nests in tree cavities, especially in large mature black cottonwood trees. Continued loss and degradation of riparian habitat and removal of cottonwood trees have resulted in substantial declines in western screech-owl populations, particularly in the southern interior of British Columbia. As a result, this owl is listed as an **endangered** species, both federally and provincially. The Fish and Wildlife Compensation Program will be conducting surveys for Western Screech-Owls in the West Kootenay in 2007. Much of the remaining habitat of this little owl occurs on private land so **we need your help to protect and restore Western Screech-Owls habitat in our area!**

### Diet:

- Mice, voles, shrews, small amphibians, reptiles and birds, large insects and earthworms.

### Description:

- Small owl with conspicuous ear tufts and yellow eyes; mottled brownish-grey plumage.
- Body Length: 20 cm  
Wingspan: 50 cm.
- More often heard than seen; two common calls are: a hollow, whistled double trill, and a series of low hoots that speed up toward the end like a bouncing ball. Calling is most frequent in the spring.

### Similar species:

- Flammulated Owl is much smaller, has dark eyes, shorter ear tufts and a rusty shoulder patch.
- Northern Saw-Whet Owl has no ear tufts and has broad reddish streaks on its white chest.
- Northern Pygmy-Owl is much smaller, has no ear tufts and has two dark patches, edged with white on the back of its head. This species is also active during the day.



### Habitat:

- Deciduous riparian woodlands found alongside rivers, streams, ponds and lakes below 1000 m elevation; will also hunt in adjacent meadows, shrub land and coniferous forest
- Western Screech-Owls (and many other owls) nest in woodpecker or natural cavities in large live or dead trees, especially black cottonwood, trembling aspen and birch

### Did you know?

Every year owls are killed by vehicles on our local roadways. Some road kills occur on rainy nights when screech-owls are lured to roadways to hunt emerging earthworms! If you find a dead or injured screech-owl, please contact BEAKS at [beaks@kics.bc.ca](mailto:beaks@kics.bc.ca) or (250) 365-3701.



## How can I help Western Screech-Owls?

### Habitat Restoration

Western Screech-Owls are endangered in our area primarily because of loss and degradation of their riparian habitat. In fact, many other animals including mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and other birds use the same declining habitat. You can help restore screech-owl habitat by:

- allowing large live or dead trees, especially black cottonwoods, to remain standing
- planting native deciduous trees along watercourses and preventing excessive cattle grazing
- allowing natural periodic flooding of riparian woodlands to encourage natural tree regeneration
- protecting large cottonwood trees from beavers with wire fencing



Western Screech-Owl  
inside nest cavity



Northern Saw-Whet Owl  
inside nest box

### Install a Screech-Owl Nest Box

Although they are not an adequate substitute for large live or dead trees with natural cavities, nest boxes can provide temporary nesting and roosting sites for small owls in riparian habitat undergoing restoration. Plans for building a nest box are available at <http://magazine.audubon.org/backyard/backyard0201.html>

### Help Researchers

- If you live on riparian cottonwood habitats in the West Kootenay, consider granting access to your land so that researchers can survey and locate owls
- Participate in the annual BC Nocturnal Owl Survey ([www.bsc-eoc.org](http://www.bsc-eoc.org))

### More Information

For more information about the owl survey or to report a Western Screech-owl sighting in the West Kootenay please contact



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### Other References

FWCP reports [www.fwcp.ca](http://www.fwcp.ca)  
[http://www.fwcp.ca/reports/teaser.php?report\\_id=430](http://www.fwcp.ca/reports/teaser.php?report_id=430)  
[http://www.fwcp.ca/reports/teaser.php?report\\_id=314](http://www.fwcp.ca/reports/teaser.php?report_id=314)

Habitat Atlas for Wildlife At Risk: south Okanagan and lower Similkameen  
<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/sir/fwh/wld/atlas/species/screech.html>

### Recovery Partners

♦ The National Recovery Team for the Western Screech-Owl (*macfarlanei* subspecies) ♦ South Okanagan – Similkameen Conservation Program ♦ Ducks Unlimited Canada ♦ South Okanagan – Similkameen Stewardship ♦ The Land Conservancy of BC ♦ Partners in Flight BC/Yukon ♦ BC Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection ♦ Bird Studies Canada ♦