



Screech Owl Houses

There are over 20 species of owls in the United States. Screech Owls are some of the smallest members of the owl family. The Eastern Screech Owl is the species found in the Austin area. It has feathered ear tufts and is a gray to reddish-brown color. It is only 6 – 10 inches in length and weighs only about 5 – 8 ounces. For such a small bird, however, it is a very valuable and intriguing member of our wildlife community. It eats many pests in the human environment, such as mice, cockroaches, and grasshoppers. These Screech Owl houses can work whether you have a small urban lot or large acreage, so give an owl a home where you live!

Screech owls like to nest in the transition zone between wooded areas and open fields. They need open space in which to hunt, and the woods for cover and protection. This is why screech owls often like our landscaped urban and suburban homes, parks, and golf courses.

Ideally locate the box where you can view the owls' activity, but at least 20 feet away from your viewing window. The area in front of the opening of the box should be free from obstruction, so that owls can fly freely into and out of their house. Choose a tall tree, a pole, or the side of the house or garage. It must be shaded at least half the day. Place the box so that the opening faces east, south, or west (avoiding cold northern winds) and where it is at least 10 feet from the ground. Make sure the house is level. Attach the house with at least 2 screws.

Put a large handful or two of **dry** leaf litter in the bottom of the house. Do not use green leaves or vegetation, soil, sawdust, or woodchips. It may be helpful to use a squirrel guard at the base of the tree or pole to prevent squirrels from nesting and snakes from pilfering.

Screech owls may move into the house immediately, or it may take years to see a resident. They will use their house in the cool season or during breeding season. The average city block can hold one pair of owls (two houses). For larger acreage, two owl houses may be installed for every 5 – 20 acres. When installing more than one house on your property, make them at least 10 feet apart.

In Texas, screech owls generally lay eggs in mid- to late-March. The eggs hatch in about 30 days. The babies remain hidden for at least 20 more days, when they may begin climbing up the inside of the box to where we can see them. Therefore, in Texas, the earliest the babies might begin to fly is mid-May. Once they leave the nest, they do not return.

Enjoy your new feathered friends!

Get to know our local screech owls! Find out more through your local library or online. Here are just a few of the resources online:

<http://txtbba.tamu.edu/species-accounts/eastern-screech-owl/>

<http://txtbba.tamu.edu/species-accounts/western-screech-owl/>

http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Eastern_Screech-Owl.html

http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Western_Screech-Owl.html