

Eastern Screech Owl

Resident Species

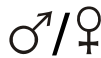
Petit-duc maculé
Megascops asio



Wingspan: M 48 cm to 57 cm /F 50 cm to 62 cm



The Eastern Screech Owl is the smallest owl in Quebec. Its plumage imitates extremely well the bark of trees, which allows the bird to pass unnoticed when resting on a tree branch. It even squints to hide its large yellow eyes from intruders passing nearby, all the while keeping a vigilant eye upon them. Its round head bears egrets. Three different morphs are recognized: grey, red and, the rarest, chocolate brown.



The male and female are similar.



Eastern Screech Owl lives in well-lit forests, in parks and wooded areas near cities and suburbs, as well as in orchards.



This little owl is opportunistic, meaning it will feed on any prey found abundantly in its environment; rodents, insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and sometimes fish and the occasional bat. The bird is strictly nocturnal.



The Eastern Screech Owl record for longevity is 13 years 6 months.



The owl builds its nest in tree cavities, in woodpecker holes or in a nest box. The couple is socially monogamous; meaning it stays together for several years. The female lays 4 to 5 eggs.



The young leave the nest 28 to 35 days after hatching and their first flight is taken a few days later. They depend upon their parents 5 to 8 weeks after they leave the nest.



The Eastern Screech Owl population is threatened by the destruction of its habitat including trees well-suited to its nesting habits. In fact, the cutting of dead trees or trees presenting woodpecker holes found in orchards greatly impacts this little bird as it is incapable of making nest holes itself. The spraying of orchards with pesticides also seems to contribute to the declining population.



In French, we separate owls into two types: “hibou” and “chouette”. Both of these words mean owl in English, but there is a difference. A “hibou” has tufts of feathers on the top of the head, called egrets, which we often confuse with ears. The purpose of egrets is poorly understood. One theory suggests that they are use to communicate, since the owl can move them voluntarily, while another theory proposes that the egrets help funnel sound into the ears. As for the “chouette,” it does not have any egrets.