

# Suburban Eastern Screech Owls<sup>1</sup>

A little back-story is required here.

In early March, 2018 - a little over a year ago - my wife Kathi and I became aware one night of a [soft trill](#) outside. At first we thought it was a frog, but after searching around in the dark, I discovered a small owl sitting in a Crepe Myrtle tree outside the front door, silhouetted against an overcast sky.

A little research told us it was a Screech Owl, March was breeding season and s/he was probably looking for a mate. For the next week or so, we heard it calling almost every night soon after dusk.



A few weeks later, I was walking up the sidewalk to the front door and I saw an owl face watching me from a Bluebird nest box on one of the front trees. Normally, the hole in a Bluebird nest box is only 1.5" in diameter, but several years back, something, maybe a squirrel, had enlarged it to about 3" - exactly the size to attract a Screech Owl. Inside, it's about 9" square. Way too small but they were trying.

For the next several weeks we were entertained by it watching us as we went about working in the yard or going to and from the house.

Then we became aware that there were two. Never at the same time but definitely two. The one shown here was larger than the other with random spots on its head and the other smaller with the spots arranged more as three vertical bars.

I don't know if this pattern variation was an individual characteristic or something that was sex related and have found no reference to it anywhere. It would look like their head was poking out filling the hole, but in reality they were actually perched on the edge of the box - enlarging the photo on the right, you can *just* see his right toes clutching the wood.

Then, in late March they just disappeared and we didn't see them for several days.



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<sup>1</sup> This Owl Diary is an updated version of our experiences and learning curve with a pair of Screech Owls in 2018 and 2019. It was posted live as it happened on my Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/clyde.r.camp>. All of the photos and movies that were taken can be seen chronologically at <https://ckcamp.smugmug.com/Owls/> (2018) and <https://ckcamp.smugmug.com/Owls2/> (2019)

I took advantage of their absence in early April, 2018 and removed the [Bluebird sized box](#), replacing it with a [Screech Owl sized box](#) based on the design favored by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#). I put the box up around 6pm on a Sunday night and in less than an hour it was occupied. It stayed occupied off and on for a week or so and then they were gone again.

About 3 months later, in July, I was eating breakfast at the kitchen table and heard a 'thunk' at the window. I looked up and there was an owl latched onto the screen and looking in. It looked weird, like it was perched on a stick poking out of the window, but most likely it had its claws in the screen and was just twisted around funny. By the time I got over my shock and called Kathi, it was gone.



In early August, Kathi called me to come "quick" to see an obviously juvenile owl perched on the edge of the fountain and playing with the dripping water. It was aware of us and unconcerned but flew off before I thought to get a camera. Its hesitant old-maid-toe-in-the-water and awkward movements identified it as a juvenile - probably the same one from a week earlier. A few days later he showed up again for a drink of water<sup>2</sup> while being pestered by a jay in the tree above.



A few days later, I looked out that same window and saw an owl sitting on one of the fence rails. It was peering at me through the wooden lattice. Over the next few days it would reappear in the early afternoon and perch somewhere on the fence rail where it could observe us in the kitchen.

And then one day there were two. The second one was noticeably larger and more sure of itself and we now believe that it was probably the female parent teaching junior how to hunt.

The kitchen window looks out on a very private and secluded side yard about 70 feet long and 6 feet wide with an 8-foot fence on one side, the house (with kitchen window) on the other and roofed over by Crepe Myrtle and Wisteria. Ideal for raising a kid.

They would show up in the early afternoon and leave at dusk and I took lots of pictures and movies. The videos and pictures aren't all that good because I was shooting through a double pane window with a screen. But they're good enough to see what's going on.

In the mornings, it was not uncommon to see a head peeking out of the front nest box. It was a lot more shy and would duck quickly back into the nest box as soon as we stepped out the front door.



<sup>2</sup> See <https://ckcamp.smugmug.com/Owls/i-FV7cTpM/A>

But the ones on the side weren't shy at all as long as the window stayed closed. They'd interact with squirrels and jays – the larger (presumably adult) one more sedately and higher on the fence ... just watching. The smaller (presumably younger) more jerky and easily startled by a car or passing plane overhead. Both would sit for long stretches in the same place and then, seemingly suddenly, would be in different places. Our favorite pose for a couple of days was like a couple of Hindu Goddesses, almost symmetrically posed in the window frame.

This kept up from August through October with the juvenile gradually becoming almost indistinguishable from the adult. Then, in late October, we saw them both fly off one night and not return for several days.

[ In retrospect, I suspect an entire brood had been raised in that front nest box in the summer of 2018 with us only seeing these two after the brood had fledged. We hadn't been explicitly looking and may not have noticed that the nest box was indeed occupied. When it *was* occupied in March of 2019 with four owlets, we would not have noticed had I not just happened on the eggs. ]



In late October when we hadn't seen them for a week or so, I took the time with my granddaughter Mckenzee to build a second nest box and install it on the top of the kitchen window fence. It's positioned sort of awkwardly in that the opening isn't readily visible unless you're standing directly in front of the window or leaning down. Furthermore, it's almost locked by the trunk of a large Crepe Myrtle.

We don't know exactly when it arrived, but in mid-November, 2018 we noticed that it had an occupant. From then through mid-March, 2019 Mr. or Mrs. Owl would sit in the opening starting about 5pm and doze while watching us in the kitchen, his head following us back and forth as we walked around. At deep dusk, it would fly off and return sometime before morning. He could have been watching us for weeks before we noticed.

The front box continued to show no activity at all although when inspected in early February there were loose feathers and a depression in the mulch. But we never saw an owl in it.



As the days started getting longer in the spring of 2019, the Kitchen Owl (as we were calling him now) began often sticking his head out earlier in the day, from 1-ish to 2-ish as well as around 5pm. And it would play peek-a-boo with us, hiding from sight behind the tree trunk.

Once while doing some work on the side, I did see him dart out and perch on a limb of the overhanging Crepe Myrtle tree where he sat long enough for me to go inside and get my



camera. In mid-March, 2019 we noticed he was gone and we never came back.

But March 21 brought new Happenings and the Screech Owls in Suburbia Facebook page.

This Facebook log begins March 21, 2019 and the text is taken from the entries for the actual days with grammar/spelling corrected. Items in brackets are additional notes added for this narrative and each picture is linked to the full-sized photo on my Smugmug.com page.

## March 21, 2019

On March 21, for no particular reason, I decided to do another inspection of both nest boxes.

I had done one in February to get a couple of owl pellets (owls don't have a crop to grind things up so bones, teeth and fur gets gagged back up into an owl pellet – about the size of your first thumb joint.) They can be dissected to see what the Owl has been eating. In this case they were filled with tiny mammalian bones and teeth.

I waited until about 8pm the night of the 21st when I was sure he was gone and then took a ladder out and opened up the Kitchen nest box. Very messy - lots of feathers, guano, a half dozen big owl pellets and, for some reason, several wisteria seed pods.

I took a couple of pictures, closed it back up and moved the ladder around to the front.



I was totally flabbergasted to discover five eggs on the wooden floor of the box. I took a look around and spotted the mother (probably) sitting on the next tree over watching me. I had scratched on the side of the box but wasn't really looking for anything to happen because I thought it was empty. So I didn't see or hear her fly out but she must have. I took pictures and closed things back up.

I have no idea when the eggs were laid, but when they hatch, I can count back 30 days to get an approximation. Right now I have no idea whether they will hatch tomorrow or sometime around the end of April.

## March 22, 2019

Resisted the urge to go look again and signed up for *NestWatch.org*, read the documentation, took the test and got an official Nestwatch Certificate. Put in all the data for yesterday. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, inspecting the nest every 3-4 days is the optimum tradeoff between pestering the Mom on her eggs and catching events as they happen.

## March 24, 2019



1) A better pic of the nestbox. The side facing the camera is the one that lifts up for monitoring

[Based on the Cornell site, the best time to monitor the nest is in the late afternoon although they are a little vague on variations for nocturnal birds. In any case, I put the ladder up and, while watching the entry hole, scratched gently on the side of the box.

2) Still 5 eggs, but they've been repositioned.. Not knowing when they were laid means it could be as long as 30-days before they hatch.



Also, note the yellow tipped songbird feather behind the eggs. There were several others on the near wall out of camera sight. Probably a goldfinch dinner.

[ The eggs are laying directly on the wood of the nest box floor and rearranged from what they were the first time I saw them. I had put a couple of handfuls of cedar [actually cypress] mulch in the bottom of both boxes to mimic the clutter found in a natural cavity - sort of.

I also observed that her nest box is, except for a lot of feathers indicating she's been there for a while, pretty clean compared to the male's box. No owl pellets, no droppings, no wisteria pods. Nor are there any on the ground below the box. All the articles say that this is to help prevent attracting predators. For the same reason, I'm supposed to approach and leave the tree from a different direction each time. That's going to be difficult though. ]

[ Actually, another scenario is that the Kitchen bird and this bird are the same female. It could be she holed up in the kitchen box until she was ready to lay eggs and then moved. Maybe that's why we never saw the Kitchen box bird again. ]

3) Mom in the center of the picture waiting for me to go away.

[ This time I saw her burst out and fly over to one of the front trees, where she stood up tall and watched me for 20 seconds or so before taking a large dump and flying off. Kathi thinks she saw her come back about 15 minutes later. You can see from the picture how well camouflaged she is. ]

As time went on, she'd leave the nest as soon as she heard the ladder itself clack as I moved it to the tree. ]



## March 26, 2019

She didn't seem quite so frantic coming out of the nestbox today when I scratched on the side. Then again, she didn't hang around to watch like she has before.

The eggs have been shuffled around again but other than that all is the same.

## March 29, 2019

Kathi pointed out something to me the other day. We haven't seen our pet male owl out the kitchen window since the day I discovered the eggs exactly one week ago.

We could have this backwards. The owl in the front, obviously female, could be the same owl we were seeing on the side for the past few months.

I suppose we'll never know. The male is supposed to hang around and bring her food while she's incubating the eggs and then help out feeding the brood when they hatch.

But, also, the male apparently often has two or three wives (to anthropomorphize) to take care of. So I don't know. Maybe he'll show back up when the eggs hatch.

## March 31, 2019

Still 5 eggs, but in the diagonal corner of the box is a neat stack of two still-feathered bird 'parts'. Looks like both have the same feather colors and neither includes a head. Somebody's building a larder I guess.

And ... the male showed up again today in the box outside the kitchen window.



[ It was indeed the larder – or rather, the start of one. At one point she had a full dozen of the headless bodies stashed in three corners with the eggs in the 4<sup>th</sup>. The birds were Cedar Waxwings –about the size of a robin but they come in flocks and were probably easy pickings.

Two or three days before I discovered the eggs, I found two Grackle heads lying on the sidewalk. Probably her doing as well. ]

## April 2, 2019

We have Chicklets - 3 out and 2 on the way. Based on the fuzziness of the chicks, they are probably 24-36 hours old. Newly hatched, they look like naked drowned rats.

[ At this point I decided to look every day in order not to miss anything. ]

## April 3, 2019



OK, I count the three previously hatched ones from yesterday (that probably actually hatched on Monday), The newly hatched (today) naked newbie and one unhatched egg.

There are also at least 6 bird carcasses stacked up now plus one that's been torn apart. I'm trying to keep my intrusions to well under a minute. I'll try to do better on the focus tomorrow.



## April 4, 2019

At 6:30 tonight, Mom wasn't on the nest when I opened the box for a looksee.

All four of the hatched chicks were all huddled together. The naked kid from yesterday this time is now just one of the down-covered chicks in a big pile squirming around.

The 5th egg appears to be cracked and may be defunct.

And I swear there are at least 9 carcasses now - none with heads, but they do have feet.

There are a few ants around the outside of the box and I'm sure the inside. Hopefully they're interested in the dead rather than live birds. I've ordered some tanglefoot for around the bottom of the box and where it touches the tree.

[ 10pm ] Unfortunately I was right about the 5th egg. I went to take a letter out to the mailbox just now and it was lying on the ground about 3ft from the trunk of the tree.

A shame, but at least the other four made it. Depending on many factors, not all of them may make it yet through the next 30 days to fledglings. I was worried about food, but it appears from the larder that's not going to be an issue.



## April 8, 2019

Three days since the last peek and they are growing and the larder is down to 1.5 torsos.

Mom didn't blast out like a rocket this time. She looked out when the ladder went up against the tree, looked down at me and then casually flew across the street to a pretty good sized tree.

After I finished videoing the chicks, I walked over there and she was way up high keeping track of three jays and a pair of cardinals that weren't really attacking her but were definitely darting all around her and wanting her gone.

She's the little dark blob in the smack dab center of the video. You can see several other birds flying in it, but she stays put through the whole thing.



## April 10, 2019

Mom heard the ladder come out today and was gone by the time I got it to the tree. She flew off to high in the neighbor's tree and watched as I took the two movies. The wind was blowing like a bat and the only vantage point I had was framed in by other limbs - so she'd disappear when the wind blew her one way or the other. I must have taken 20 shots to get these.



The pre-hatch larder is now completely gone and the chicks are bigger and more aware every day. Their snow white down is starting to get dark (dirty?) and you can already see emerging pin feathers that will grow into their eventual plumage.

[ It was about this time that someone complained that I needed to quit opening up the box – it was too stressful. I referred them to nestwatch's recommendations and that was the end of it. ]

## April 12, 2019

Mom definitely knows the sound of the ladder and heads out across the street. The kids continue to grow, so food is being brought in by someone during the night. No evidence of food remains or food digestive, uh, byproducts. Very clean nest.

Chicks all wide eyed and active. [ Note those feet on the one in front – starting to look like real raptor feet ]



## April 14, 2019

Mid afternoon nap time. The pantry has been restocked with another couple of Cedar Waxwings and (new delicacy) a couple of furry mousy thingies.

And you can see there are definitely four chicks in this configuration.



## April 16, 2019



← [ Waxwing body in the foreground ]

[ Waxwings stacked up like cordwood ] →



## April 17, 2019

Here's [[a movie of](#)] what happens every other day now on the Screech Owl Nestwatch in my front yard. Kathi's filming. For the last couple of days, I've done the chick-check mid-afternoon. But both times they've all been munged together into one blob of sleeping, softly breathing feathers.

I think this may be because they've just been fed and it's naptime. After this, I'll try waiting until later in the day around early dusk to see if they're more active.

## April 19, 2019

Last video was 5 days ago. Mom wasn't in the nestbox just now but the chicks sure were. These guys are getting big.





## April 21, 2019

Mommmmmmm ..... !

That guy's here again and oh by the way, it's 7pm and we're ready for DINNER!



## April 25, 2019

Holy crap what a day or two makes. These guys are almost ready to go. All of a sudden, they are almost fully feathered. What you're seeing and hearing.

[Video #1](#) - As I opened the box, mom was not around. And all four chicks were spread out, not huddled up ... at all. The pops you hear are them snapping those beaks. I don't know who was more surprised. I couldn't back up far enough to get everybody on the screen. I took a quick video and closed the side when somebody started flapping.



[Video #2](#) - I switched to panoramic view and opened the side again. Everybody was wondering where the side of their house went. Then lots of beak snapping. Then lots more plus a lot of flapping. Then me trying to keep them in the nestbox by holding my hands up. Then me failing as two escaped and fluttered to the ground. Then lots of camera waiving around and me yelling for Kathi as I frantically climbed down the ladder and shut the camera off.

What you don't see is the two that escaped sitting on the ground looking around. Neither seemed overly alarmed or agitated and both allowed me to pick them up separately and slide them back into the nest box with the minimum opening possible.

Next time (two days from now) I'm going to open the box just enough to slide the camera in and take whatever shows up.

Just as I was putting the 1st one in, Mom swooshed over and watched from a branch about 10 feet away. I think dad was there as well. She flew off right after I put the 2nd one in.

## April 27, 2019

Turn on the volume for the [video](#). I cracked the door \*just\* enough to slide the camera in and it was way too dark inside to take any actual video, but they knew it was there. Lots of beak snapping/popping (sounded like a

Geiger Counter) and one foot stuck out the bottom of the door that needed to be poked back in. So definitely no more door opening.

But as I was climbing down, one of the chicks stuck his head out the front hole to watch what was going on. He, or one of the others, stayed watching for at least 30 minutes before it got too dark to take pictures.

Then, about an hour later, my son-in-law happened to be standing outside and saw one of the parents carrying a dead bird sort of crash into the hole, fight it for a few moments, then carry it in inside. A few seconds he flew back out again.



## April 29, 2019

Well, I thought I was finished with the owls with the last post, but evidently not. I was out in the front pulling up the usual crop of spring oaks that sprout thanks to the squirrels and heard noises coming from the nest box for the first time. Not hoots, or chirps or pops but definitely noises. I eased the ladder up - no mom - got the iPhone ready and opened the door about half way.

I was greeted with an owl backside that rapidly moved over to the other side of the box. Much calmer today than the other night - maybe because it was light? Maybe because I was holding the camera lower? Maybe because they recognize I'm not a real threat?

I'm amazed how clean the box is. No poop, bones, pellets. Mom and Dad must be hauling that stuff out.



## April 30, 2019

A half a dozen times today somebody has [watched us from the entry hole](#) as we walked out to get mail, stuff out of the car, taking a short break from whatever we were doing in the house.

Sometimes they duck back inside as we walk out the door. Sometimes they just watch without reacting other than to turn their head and follow us.

Could be the same one, could be differing.

Sometimes they are sitting either in the opening and you can see their claws, sometimes they are a little lower - maybe hanging onto one of the shallow cuts on the inside of the box put there for just that purpose. Once there was one way back in the box that must have been standing on somebody else.



## May 2, 2019

Sniff sniff ... chicks all gone ...

[ I think they probably departed the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> because I \*think\* I saw at least one way in the back of the nest box entrance that afternoon. But when I went to take my every other day photo it was an empty nest in every sense of the phrase.

They are not ready to fly at this point so instead of fledging they do what is called branching – hanging out on a nearby branch while mom and dad continue to feed them over the next 7-9 weeks and teach them to hunt. But there were no near-by branches.



So I expect (hope) they were enticed up into some of the nearby shrubbery instead and then on up into low tree limbs. With other nests in Flower Mound the chicks were still hanging around within 40 feet of the nest box even a month after leaving the nest.

Not so here, I've looked multiple times into all the vegetation and low limbs, but nada.

## May 5, 2019

Yuucchhhhhhh!

I cleaned out both screech owl nest boxes yesterday. They both initially had about 2 inches of cypress mulch in the bottom.

The one outside the kitchen window had a dozen or so owl pellets a few cedar waxwing feathers, lots of owl down feathers some wisteria seed pods. It was all dry and easily cleaned.

The one in the front that had the mom and 4 chicks for a month was another whole matter. It was devoid of everything except the cypress mulch and 3 cedar waxwing feathers. No idea what happened to the bones, pellets, and a LOT of feathers.

But the feces .... ah, the feces .... One entire month of 4 chicks eating at least a dozen or more waxwings plus a couple of furry things plus who knows what else. And the remnants of all that come out as owl pellets (which mom or dad evidently hauled off somewhere) and feces. And bird feces are largely liquid (uric acid) which soaks nicely into the cypress. And decomposes turns to ammonia. Like a diaper pail.

It was nasty - I had to scoop it all out, finding a few live beetle larvae of some kind and a few adults. Then I hosed it all out and put in new mulch, ready for next year.

And came inside and scrubbed my hands. Twice.

## Nestwatch.org data taken for this "Nesting Attempt"

DATE			HOST SPECIES ?			STATUS & ACTIVITY CODES				COWBIRD ACTIVITY ?			MORE INFORMATION	
Month	Day	Year	Eggs	Live Young	Dead Young	Nest Status	Adult Status	Young Status	Management Activity	Eggs	Live Young	Dead Young	Observer Initials	Notes
3	22	2019	5	0	0	no	va	no	no	0	0	0	crc	Eggs discovered
3	24	2019	5	0	0	no	aa	no	no	0	0	0	crc	Eggs rearranged
3	26	2019	5	0	0	no	aa	no	no	0	0	0	crc	
3	31	2019	5	0	0	no	aa	no	no	0	0	0	crc	One egg appeared
4	2	2019	2	3	0	no	aa	hy	no	0	0	0	crc	2 eggs hatching
4	3	2019	1	4	0	no	aa	hy	no	0	0	0	crc	5th egg looks
4	4	2019	0	4	1	no	aa	ny	no	0	0	0	crc	5th egg cracked
4	8	2019	0	4	0	no	aa	ny	no	0	0	0	crc	
4	10	2019	0	4	0	no	aa	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	12	2019	0	u	0	no	aa	py	no	0	0	0	0	Only saw 3
4	14	2019	0	4	0	no	aa	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	16	2019	0	4	0	no	va	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	17	2019	0	4	0	no	no	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	19	2019	0	4	0	no	no	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	21	2019	0	4	0	no	no	py	no	0	0	0	0	
4	25	2019	0	4	0	no	va	fy	no	0	0	0	0	Two hooded
4	27	2019	0	4	0	no	va	fy	no	0	0	0	0	At least 1 chick
4	29	2019	0	4	0	no	va	fy	no	0	0	0	0	Parent observed
4	30	2019	0	4	0	no	no	fy	no	0	0	0	0	two chicks
5	2	2019	0	0	0	no	no	no	no	0	0	0	0	
5	5	2019	0	0	0	no	no	no	nm	0	0	0	0	Cleaned out box

# Nestwatch.org Summary for this “Nesting Attempt”

## NEST FATE

**Nest monitoring stopped prior to expected fledge date while nest was still active**

Nesting attempt outcome comments:

First nesting attempt seen - 4 out of 5 eggs hatch and eventually fledged. Apparently healthy, no predators, primary food source observed was Cedar Waxwings (at least 12 stockpiled before eggs hatched)

## IMPORTANT DATES

First Egg Laid Date

**March 2, 2019 (estimated)**

Hatch Date

**April 2, 2019 (estimated)**

Fledge Date

**May 1, 2019**

## HOST SPECIES TOTALS

Visits to Nest

**21**

Clutch Size

**5**

Unhatched Eggs

**1**

Live Young

**4**

Fledglings

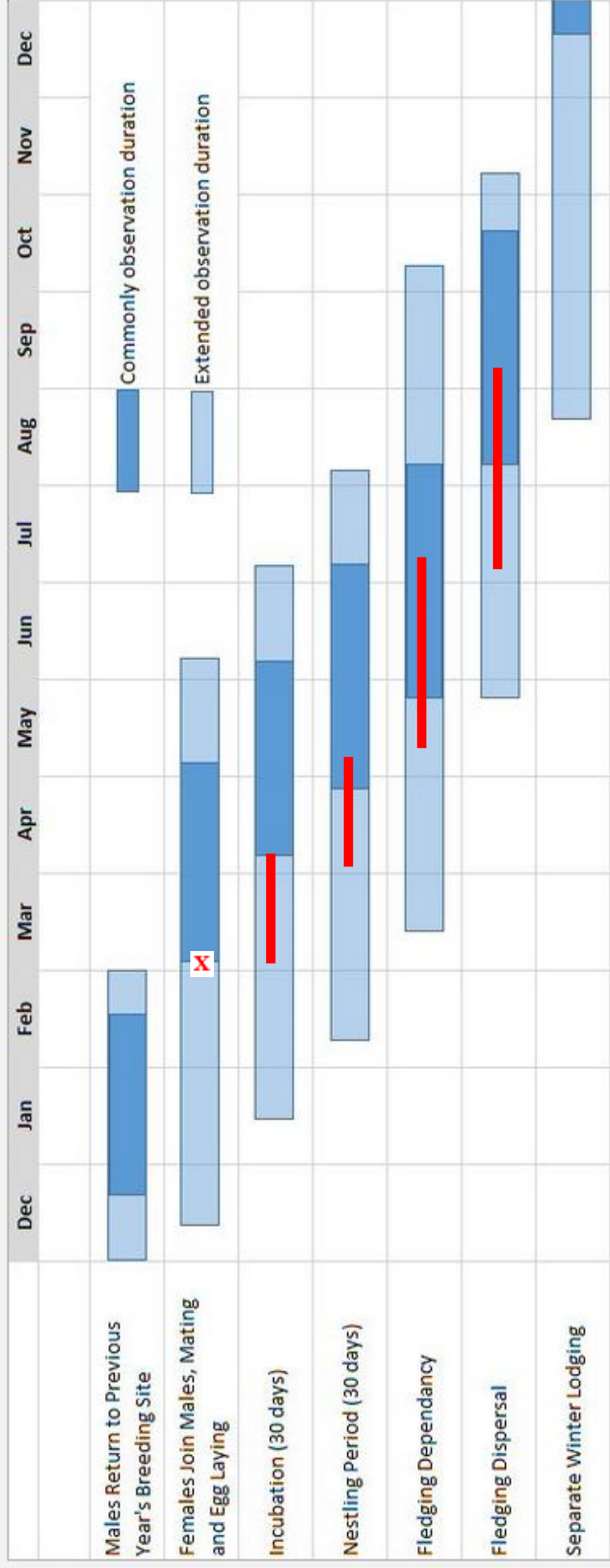
**4**

## YOUR THOUGHTS

Please provide any additional details about this nesting attempt.

This is texas. Weather warm. 5 eggs first seen 3/22. 3 hatched a little over 1 week later 4/2. Counting back 30 days from that date gives the March 2 estimated first egg laid. For SURE, there were 4 live chicks in the nestbox on 4/15.

## Annual Breeding Cycle



## Screech Owls in Suburbia – About the Nest Boxes



This box in my front yard has been up and occupied since March, 2018 and is beginning to weather.

The wood is rough cedar (same as most Plano fences but 12-inches wide instead of 6 or 4).

The 3” hole (optimum for Screech Owls according to the Cornell University Ornithology Lab) is supposed to be 10-15 feet off the ground. This one is about 9 feet up but there’s somebody in it anyway.

Multiple boxes can be put up, but they should be spaced at least 100 feet apart.

Screech Owls survive well in urban environments and are relatively un-caring about nest box placement. It’s more or less *Build It and It Will Be Occupied*.

This one was occupied within an hour of it being up, but it replaced a Bluebird nest box which the owls were trying to use (way too small but a pair was trying anyway.)



The 2<sup>nd</sup> box is on the fence at the side of the house. The fence is a little bit bent so the board holding this nest box is shimmed at the top so that the board is vertical. Probably not necessary for the occupant, but it looks better to me. It’s directly opposite a large kitchen window so we can see the occupant and he can see us.

That’s an 8’ fence, so the hole is about 10’ up.

Nest boxes should be up well before nesting season (mid-March to mid-May).

If you hear a [soft trill at night](#) or in the evening, or a [horse in a tree](#) then you’ve got action going.



The same box as before, but from about 30 feet away looking down the side yard from the front of the house.

With the fence on one side, the house on the other, two Crepe Myrtles overgrown with Wisteria, this is a very secluded private nesting location.

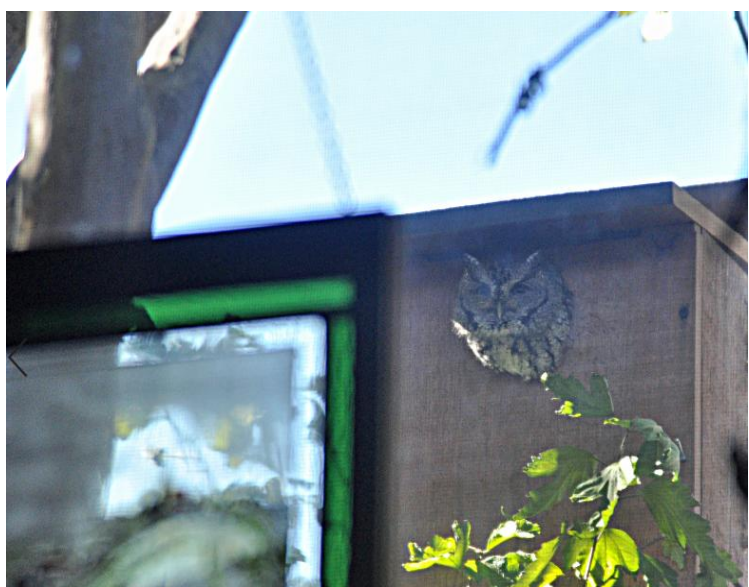
You can *just* make out an owl head (as a dark blob) sticking out from the top of the nest box.

I can't get much nearer from outside or he'll fly out.

Screech Owls are only 6-8" tall with a wingspan about twice that and weighs about 6 ounces. They are *not* baby Horned Owls but are sometimes mistaken for them. Eastern screech owls have a varied diet. They eat many small mammals, especially rodents such as mice and voles. They eat a variety of insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, tadpoles, earthworms, crustaceans, cockroaches and birds (Sparrows, Finches, Cedar Waxwings).

They are opportunistic feeders, waiting in trees for

prey to pass below and then pouncing on it from 6-10 off the ground.



The same scene from inside our house through the kitchen window. He (or she) is very aware, but unconcerned, of my wife and I walking around in the kitchen. We can get right up against the window and he doesn't care - But if we open the window, he's gone! An hour or so later, he's back. The one seen is actually perched on the edge of the hole.

Eastern Screech-Owls build no nest, instead laying eggs on whatever debris is at the bottom of the nesting cavity - wood-chips, twigs, or the cast-off feathers and droppings from a previous year's nest. Settling in, she makes a body-shaped depression where her eggs lie.

Use a couple of handfuls of hardwood or pine wood shavings or large mulch for the bottom of the box – *not* sawdust and *not* cedar. I use Cypress Mulch. Boxes should *not* be painted and will weather to the same gray color that cedar picket fences do in a couple of years.





View showing

- Back with Back braces at top and bottom
- Front with 3" entry and overhanging sloped Roof
- Non-door side (it really is slanted at the top although this angle doesn't show it well) and Roof with 3/8" spacer for ventilation



View showing recessed floor with corner cutouts for drainage



View of Door side with Door knob dowel, front hinge screw (front right top), protruding latching Pin (front right middle).

With latch pin removed, door pulls open. A couple of eyehooks could be used instead to secure the door from opening



View inside door with entrance hole and grooved fledging 'ladder' for the young to escape and mulch

The outside dimensions of the box are about 11-3/4" wide by 9-1/4" deep by 15" high and is mounted to a 12x24" board for fastening to a tree or post.

There is a door for checking for eggs, but it should not be used before eggs are laid or she may abandon the box (wait until late May to be sure). Once eggs are laid, checking on the nest might scare her off, but she'll come back.

Scratch on the side of the box and open door slowly when checking for eggs or chicks to give her a chance to vacate.

### Ordering Information

If you want one from me, the wood used is rough on one side and smooth on the other – You can specify which side is outside when you order the box.

Boxes are custom made to order and will take approximately one week. They may be ordered from the address below.

Cost is \$70 with a \$35 deposit and the remaining \$35 due on completion.

Shipping is extra, but delivery in and around the Dallas Metroplex is free or they can be picked up from the address below.

Clyde R. Camp  
 623 Hanover Dr.  
 Allen, TX 75002  
 972-727-3945 (leave message)  
 c.camp@ieee.org



## Frequently Asked Questions

- **What Do They Eat?**

Eastern screech owls have a varied diet. They eat many small mammals, especially rodents such as mice and voles. They eat a variety of insects, reptiles, amphibians, fish, tadpoles, earthworms, crustaceans, cockroaches and sometimes birds (Sparrows, Finches, Cedar Waxwings). They are occasionally, but rarely, cannibalistic if food sources are low.

They are opportunistic feeders, waiting in trees for prey to pass below and then pouncing on it from 6 - 10 feet off the ground.

I have dissected [owl pellets](#) from mine and found rodent bones up to an inch long and lots of insect parts. Once the lower jaw of a mouse.

**Note !! If you put out rat poison - PLEASE REMOVE IT!! An owl eating a poisoned rat will most likely die**

- **NestBox Construction Info**

- Conforms to design by Cornell University Ornithology Lab specifically for Eastern Screech Owl
- Custom made to order - approx. 1 week lead time
- Material: Cedar
- Outside dimensions: 21 x 11 x 15 (box size: 10 x 10 x 15)
- Three inch diameter entrance
- Sloping roof for rain runoff and to deter predators
- Slots or ledges below hole on inside to assist young in getting to the opening
- Ventilation gap between roof and sides
- Drainage holes in recessed bottom
- Structural reinforcement for mounting on pole or tree
- Box Weight: ~10 lbs
- Latchable door to clean out box or check on eggs/chicks
- Cost \$70 -- \$35 down and the remainder on completion
- Delivery in the Plano/Allen, TX area is free.
- Delivery in North Texas is by customer pickup at

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623 Hanover Dr.  
Allen, TX 75002  
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## • Screech Owl General Info

### ○ **Where do they live?**

They occupying lowland forests to mountainside woodlands, both deciduous and evergreen. Because they readily accept people, Eastern Screech-Owls often roost and nest in human-made cavities such as bird boxes. They are often the most common avian predator in wooded suburban and urban habitats.

Eastern Screech-Owls are socially and genetically monogamous. Nesting occurs between March and June. Females incubate 3 to 5 eggs for 30 days, feed nestlings for about the same period of time and then tend the fledglings for 8 to 10 weeks. The female will often take one of the fledglings out for training.

I have two boxes and probably two owls. One of the occupants is almost always hidden away in the box on the front tree. The one in the box on the fence is as interested in us as we are of him. On sunny days he sticks his head briefly around noon and he comes back out at dusk before taking off hunting.. He watches us as we move around the kitchen as much as we watch him.

### ○ **What do they look like?**

Often identified as a baby Great Horned Owl, the Eastern Screech Owl is 6-10 inches long and weighs 4-8 ounces - basically a large stocky Robin size. but their wingspan can be 18-24 inches. Believe it or not, their preferred nesting hole is a 3" circle. Photos of the two hanging around my house can be found [here](#).

They come in two 'morphs' that are the same species - The Gray Morph is the most common in north Texas and has a gray coloration that, with their stripes, spots and tufts makes them virtually disappear when posed against gray tree bark. They can also stretch tall and hunker down small to adjust their body contour as needed. Few examples of this camouflage can be found [here](#). Several examples of the Red Morph can be seen as well.

### ○ **What do they sound like?**

They have several calls especially in the early spring when they are wooing a mate or otherwise communicating in the weeks before nesting begins when pairs are forming and during late summer and early fall when young are dispersing and seeking their own territories,

- [Horse Whinney](#) - This how I first became aware of hearing them on day or night hikes. Bottom line, if you hear a horse in the trees, it's a screech owl.
- [Monotonic Trill](#) - this is what I first heard around the house. Soft, sweet call to a mate. An answering call much further away can also be heard as well as a *very* faint hoot-hoot-hoot-hoot that I believe is a Western Screech Owl.

### ○ **Where Can I put my Nestbox**

- Just about anywhere where the hole can be 10-30 feet from the ground.
- The box should be located on a tree trunk, limb or pole of a fence.
- It should be in a sheltered area if possible.
- It can face any direction but preferably away from prevailing winds
- Good if there can be branches in front close enough for they young to hop to
- If in a yard with a pool, it should face away from the pool - the young explode out of it when fledging and you don't want drowned carcasses.
- There should be 2-3 inches of shredded bark (I use cypress mulch - *not* cedar mulch) in the bottom of the box. Owls don't build a nest - just use whatever is there.
- If you check for eggs or chicks, try to wait until after they are laid

## Resources and References

### Eastern Screech Owl

#### *Megascops asio*

- [Owl Pages - Eastern Screech Owls - calls, photos, good general info](#)
- [Cornell Lab of Ornithology - Introduction \(subscription required\)](#)
- [Cornell Lab of Ornithology - Eastern Screech Owl Life History](#)
- [NH PBS Wildlife Journal Junior - Eastern Screech Owl](#)
- [Screech Owl Breeding Behavior](#)
- [Warner Nature Center - Eastern Screech Owl FAQ](#)