

SCREECH OWL NEST BOX (AND AMERICAN KESTREL TOO)

The Eastern Screech Owl is the smallest native owl in the Treasure Coast area, reaching a length of about 8 inches. The feather “ear tufts” often cause it to be mistaken for a baby Great Horned Owl; but an actual Horned Owl the size of an adult Screech would be less than ten days old, mostly naked and quite helpless. Three color phases are common: reddish, grey, and brown. The Screech Owl’s name is a misnomer, as it never actually screeches. Instead, the call is made up of a series of hollow, vibrating notes which may be mistaken for the coo of a dove.

A bold nocturnal hunter, this owl eats insects, birds, bats, and rodents, sometimes attacking prey larger than itself. Frequenting both wild and suburban settings, it is common throughout the Treasure Coast. Nesting season extends from about March until summer; nests are built in natural and artificial cavities like woodpecker holes or inside the rotten eaves of a building. Four to six eggs are laid, and incubation lasts about 26 days. Newly hatched screech owls are white and fluffy, looking like dandelion flowers- except for the presence of two large eyes.

Screech Owls make excellent neighbors, helping to control populations of rats, mice, and harmful insects. Since their distribution and abundance is determined by available nesting sites, we encourage you to build a screech owl nesting box for your own backyard. A simple nesting box may be made from a single board, 1” x 10” by 8 feet long (see diagram). Rough cut wood that weathers well, such as cedar, cypress or redwood is preferred, as the box should remain unpainted. When complete, hang the box on a tree, building, or pole about 15 feet high. Place it within the edge of your trees, close to the open yard. Screech owls do not bring nesting materials into their nests, so you should provide them with wood shavings or pine straw. Do not use cedar shavings or sawdust! If starlings or sparrows begin to place their own nesting materials inside, remove them, as screechies will not use an occupied box.

American Kestrels, our smallest native falcons, will use the same type of nest boxes and would be most welcome nesting visitors. To specifically encourage Kestrels, place the box higher, on an isolated live or dead tree. Good luck!

Kali, a red phase Eastern Screech Owl



Plank 1” x 10” x 8’ cut diagram

