



by David Mizejewski

So you want to bring more birds to your yard? Put out a feeder and the right seed, and you're likely to attract chickadees, finches and other songbirds.

There's another bird that would be a welcome visitor—the screech owl—but you can't attract it with bird seed. This predator will come if there's adequate shelter that allows it to nest and hunt. It feeds on insects, frogs, lizards, mice and other small mammals that live in your yard. It's even capable of tak-

ing prey as large as rabbits or ducks, despite its small size (6 to 9 inches long). Screech owls sometimes prey on songbirds, too (sorry!), but remember, that's part of the natural scheme of things, and it's worth it to enjoy the presence of these cool little creatures and know that you're supporting the ecosystem.

east to west

There are two species of screech owls found in North America and, collectively, they're found coast-

to-coast wherever there are woods. The western species lives west of the Rockies from Mexico to Alaska. It has feathers in shades of gray to camouflage it against tree bark. The eastern screech owl, found east of the Rockies, has both gray and rusty brown color phases. Both species have bright yellow eyes.

listen for their call

Like most owls, screech owls are nocturnal, so it's unlikely that you'll see them during the day. And it's tough to spot them at night given their excellent camouflage and ability to fly in complete silence. But if you learn to recognize their calls, you may be able to spot them. Their most common call isn't the screech you'd expect given their name, but rather a quiet whinnying sound, almost like that of a horse, starting high and descending into lower notes. Visit

LEFT: The eastern screech owl can be found in woods east of the Rockies.

BELOW: A nesting box gives screech owls a place to raise their young and helps attract them to your yard.



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The western screech owl resides west of the Rockies.

allaboutbirds.org to hear several audio samples from both species.

give them shelter

The best way to attract these diminutive owls is to preserve mature trees in your yard and throughout your community. While they don't need huge, unspoiled forests (they're often found in the middle of cities), screech owls are dependent on patches of woods for nesting and hiding from predators like raccoons and larger owls.

You can also increase your chances of attracting them by installing a nest box. Just like many cavity-nesting songbirds, screech owls lay their eggs in holes in trees and will happily use a box. You can purchase nesting boxes from bird supply stores or build your own. Mount the box on a tree at least 10 feet off the ground, and you might just get lucky enough to host a family this spring. 🌱

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