



**ATTRACTING
EASTERN SCREECH-OWLS
INSTALL A NEST BOX IN YOUR YARD**

Eastern Screech-Owl Nest Box

Years ago, my husband built a screech-owl nest box using some vague directions given to me during a brief conversation with a fellow birder. We selected a suitable tree – large, in a wooded area, little foot-traffic, easily seen – and attached the box about 15 feet up. See photo below.

What a nice surprise when only a few weeks later, we noticed a screech-owl peeking its head out of the nest box! Every spring the owl returned; and we thoroughly enjoyed watching its fledglings adapting to the ways of the world.



Photo Doris Heard

Later we put up another nest box on the opposite side of the yard, and were delighted to find it occupied by a red phase screech-owl. Both of these boxes were occupied for more than 10 years until we moved to a townhouse in Houston. We were delighted to discover these wonderful little screech-owls are all over the Houston area, and if you have a suitable place to put a box, you too can attract one of these little owls to nest in your yard.

At night they feast on rodents, roaches, moths and other small critters. You can often hear them in the early morning or evening hours in your neighborhood. This link will give you more details on this little owl and what to listen for.

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Screech-Owl/overview

If you want to install a nest box in your yard, you can find them at the Wild Birds Unlimited store and online at the Owl Shack. Or you can build a nest box yourself! Construction details can be found at

<https://www.audubon.org/news/how-build-screech-owl-nest-box>



Ben Hulsey, past President of Houston Audubon, shared the above photo and suggestions, “The owl box in the photo is a favorite. I have one in the front yard and one in the back and always have one pair of tenants and often have two. The large square opening not only seems to be appreciated by owls, but also makes it much easier for humans to see them.”

To order a similar owl house with a large opening go to www.owlshack.com. Cliff and Julie Shackelford, the owners of the Owl Shack, are professional biologists living and working in Texas. Over the years they have modified the nest boxes that they build in their garage to be what they consider “the best owl house ever.” On their website, you will also find loads of excellent information including these suggestions for placement:

“Placement of your Owl Shack is important. Attach two of the three brackets to a vertical tree limb with a total of four heavy nails or wood screws. The rooftop needs to be 10 feet above the ground or higher. Face the Owl Shack in any direction except to the north where cold winter breezes are not welcome. Select a more open side of the tree so the owls can come and go without trying to fly through branches and leaves. If possible, position the Owl Shack on the main trunk under a large horizontal or diagonal limb to help keep rainwater off the Owl Shack. Mount the Owl Shack on a hardwood tree (oak, hickory, pecan, etc.) or a pine tree. Don’t place the Owl Shack in a thicket or in dense vegetation like cedars, junipers, or shrubbery. The owls might not find it or they might not be able to maneuver well when flying in or out. Allow them a clear flight path.

Make sure the Owl Shack is level, or nearly so, to allow the roof to keep out rainwater or bright sun. Several drain holes have been drilled in the floor in case of heavy rain. A slight tilt of the Owl Shack downward or frontward is acceptable, but a slight tilt upward or backward is not recommended. Most importantly, place the Owl Shack where you can enjoy it from a home window, but at a comfortable distance for the owls (about 20 feet or greater).”

It is important to have your owl house in place by January or early February, because that is when the owls are looking for a place to nest. Place a handful of pine needles or dry leaf litter in the bottom of the box. After installing, if you see lots of nesting material coming out of the opening, a squirrel has probably taken over the box. You need to clean out the box as soon as possible to discourage the squirrels. Your box needs to have either a hinged top or side panel that will make it easy to clean out.

Several years ago, Dana Parkey saw a little screech-owl sitting on her bathroom window sill. This link will take you to a video of what she was able to capture on her cell phone.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwMHCprK8mc>

A screech-owl nest box would make a wonderful Christmas gift for a friend or family member if they have a yard and tree that meets the requirements. A shallow bird bath is appreciated by these little owls. Try to place the bird bath where you can easily view them drinking and bathing

Doris Durbin Heard
The Garden Club of Houston



Photo by Marion Glober

After reading about building a screech-owl house, Filson Tapp, a talented builder, created his own version that has all sorts of special modifications. Notice the copper on the roof peak and a front panel that opens for easy cleaning.



Photo by Meg Tapp

Ben Hulsey's Photos of Eastern Screech-Owls



