

Western Screech-Owls Along the Shuswap River



What is a Western Screech-Owl?

Western screech-owls (*Otus kennicottii macfarlanei*) are small, primarily nocturnal owls that inhabit deciduous riparian woodlands in BC's southern interior. Previously unknown along the Shuswap River, a small population was found west of Cherryville in 2004. Screech-owls nest in natural tree cavities, especially in large mature black cottonwood trees. Continued loss and degradation of riparian habitat and removal of cottonwood trees has resulted in substantial declines in screech-owl populations. As a result, this owl is listed as an **endangered** species. **Your help is needed to restore habitat and populations of this special owl in our area!**

Screech-owl Habitat:

- Deciduous riparian woodlands found alongside rivers, streams, ponds and lakes below 1000 m elevation; will also hunt in adjacent grassland and dry coniferous woodland habitat.
- Nests in natural cavities in large live or dead trees, especially black cottonwood; may also nest in trembling aspen, birch, ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir trees, or even nest boxes.
- Roosts on branches adjacent to the trunks of trees or in natural tree cavities

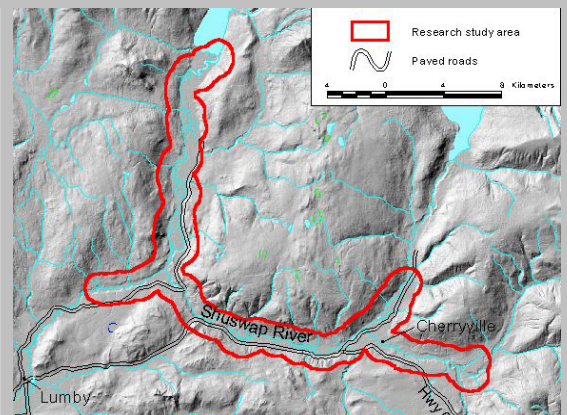


Western screech-owls at-a-glance:

- Small owl with conspicuous ear tufts and yellow eyes; mottled brownish-grey plumage.
- Body length: 18-25 cm; Wingspan: 55 cm.
- Screech-owls do not migrate and can be found here year-round.
- More often heard than seen; the most common call is a series of low whistles that speed up toward the end like a bouncing ball. Hooting occurs year-round, but is most frequent February - April.

Research on Screech-Owls:

- Very little is known about the general ecology of BC's screech-owls, so a research study is being started in the Shuswap Falls area.
- Screech-owls will be captured and outfitted with radio-transmitters.
- Researchers will follow owls to determine how large their home ranges are, where and what they eat, how many young they produce and how they are dying.



How can you help Western Screech-Owls?



Habitat Restoration

Western Screech-Owls are endangered in BC primarily because of loss and degradation of their riparian habitat. In fact, many other animals use the same declining habitat. Even fish require the shade and other ecological services provided by healthy riparian plant communities. You can help restore screech-owl habitat by:

- allowing live or dead black cottonwood trees >36 cm in diameter, to remain standing.
 - planting native deciduous trees along watercourses.
 - allowing natural periodic flooding of riparian woodlands to encourage regeneration.
 - planting native trees and shrubs, or allowing natural vegetation to grow in the open understory of grazed woodlands.
- excluding livestock and development from riparian areas. Installation of fencing can help exclude cattle from riparian areas, while allowing grazing in adjacent upland areas with more suitable forage.

Help Researchers

If you own cottonwood habitats along the Shuswap River, consider granting access to your land so that researchers can track radiotagged owls.

Install a Screech-Owl Nest Box

Although they are not an adequate substitute for large live or dead trees with natural cavities, nest boxes can provide temporary nesting and roosting sites for screech-owls in riparian habitat undergoing restoration. Plans for building a nest box are available at the Audubon website:

<http://magazine.audubon.org/backyard/backyard0201.html>



More Information

Call owl researchers (Helen Davis or Richard Weir) at Artemis Wildlife Consultants at 1-888-223-4376 for information about the research study or to report screech-owls along the Shuswap River.

With financial support from:

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Photos by: Andy M. Bezener/One Wild Earth Ecological Services.