



Effie Yeaw Nature Center

Bird Residents of the Nature Center

Twilight the Western Screech Owl

Personal History:

Twilight was caught by a cat when she was just a fledgling in the Spring of 2007. The cat brought the little owl into the house and the cat owners took the injured bird to the California Foundation for Birds of Prey, who specialize in the treatment and rehabilitation of raptors. Her wounds healed except for some damage to her eyes. The eye damage was not repairable and would keep her from being able to capture insects and other food in the wild, so she could not be rehabilitated and released. Because she had to depend on people for her care so early in her life, she became very accustomed to people. This made her an ideal educational bird for our programs, so she came to live at the Nature Center.



Natural History: Western Screech-Owl (*Otus kennicotti*)

Description: Screech owls are small with grayish-brown camouflage and conspicuous ear tufts. They have relatively large eyes and heads. The wing feathers have a wavy edge that allows silent flight. It is 7-10 inches long and has an 18-24 inch wingspread.

Habitat: The western screech owl is probably the most common owl in North America, living in a variety of habitats and even nesting on the outskirts of cities in residential areas. They may live in woodlands, orchards, backyards with trees, and wooded areas near running water. They prefer oak groves or riparian areas with cottonwoods and willows.

Food: Mainly large insects, but they also eat mice, shrews and other small animals.

Communication: The screech owl's call is not a screech but a soft, mournful whinny; a series of monotonous, evenly pitched notes that start slowly, then increase in tempo until they run together. When disturbed, it makes an ominous bill snapping, but seldom uses its needlelike claws in defense.

Nesting Behavior: The western screech owl is one of the most strictly nocturnal of North American owls. It roosts during the day in hollow trees, in dark corners of old buildings, or huddled close to the trunks of densely foliated trees. They frequently use no nesting materials, occupying a tree cavity or woodpecker hole. Screech owls occupy an ecological niche similar to that occupied by the American kestrel, except that it is nocturnal in behavior. Hence the kestrel and the owl complement each other in habitat

and niche requirements. In fact, the two species frequently use the same types of nest sites.

Reproduction & Care of Young: Four or five eggs are the usual number, laid from February to July, depending on the locale. The eggs are white, oval or round, and are incubated largely or entirely by the female for 26 days. The male may roost in the nesting hollow during the day while the female is incubating the eggs. The male usually provides food for the female and both feed the young. The young first fly about 28 days after hatching.

Additional Information: Enemies of the screech owl include larger owls, jays, magpies and crows.

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