

This resource is based on the following source:

Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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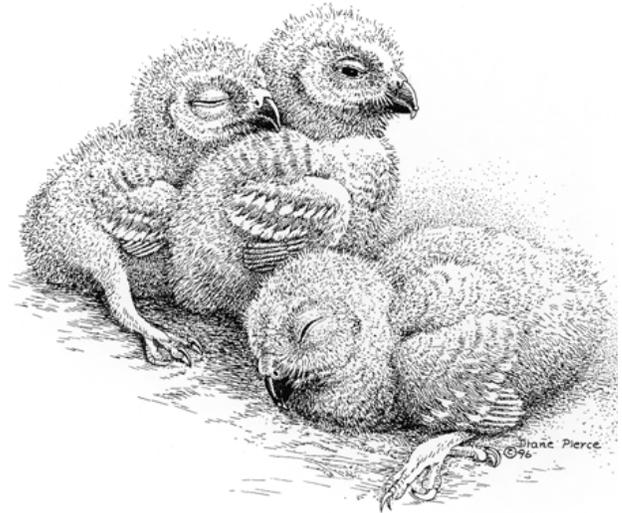
Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. 2003, January 6. Florida's breeding bird atlas: A collaborative study of Florida's birdlife. <http://www.myfwc.com/bba/> (Date accessed mm/dd/yyyy).

Eastern Screech-Owl *Otus asio*

A common resident throughout the state, the Eastern Screech-Owl is Florida's smallest owl. It occurs in suitable habitat everywhere in the state except the Lower Keys (Ogden 1977).

Three color morphs occur red, brown, and gray although there is considerable variation within each. These color morphs are independent of the bird's age, sex, and location within Florida. Because of their higher tolerance for warmer temperatures, red and brown morphs are more common in Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), however, according to Kale and Maehr (1990), all 3 color forms may occur in the same nest.

Eastern Screech-Owls are breeding residents from southern Canada to central Mexico and throughout the eastern United States to the Florida Keys.



Habitat. This species is found in all types of wooded habitats, including suburban backyards. Eastern Screech-Owls feed on a variety of animals including insects, lizards, mice, and small birds (Howell 1932). Illustration © 1995 Diane Pierce, All Rights Reserved.

Eastern Screech-Owls nest in tree cavities, but readily accept artificial nest boxes. Although 2 to 4 all-white eggs may be laid, the usual clutch is 3 eggs (Kale, in litt.). They are incubated for 26 days, and the young fledge at days of age (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. The Eastern Screech-Owl's breeding season is usually considered to be from March through May; however, Lewis (1988) noted 2 separate fledging periods in Hendry County (May and June, November and December), which may indicate second broods. Further, Ogden (in Paul 1987) reported 2 clutch from presumably the same pair fledging in March and July 1987, from a nest box in the Keys. However, only 1 brood is raised per year at Archbold Biological Station in Highlands County (F. Lohrer, in litt.).

Status. The Atlas map reveals many gaps in the Eastern Screech-Owl's distribution. Virtually all of these can be assumed to represent insufficient coverage rather than an actual lack of birds. The most notable exceptions to this are the Everglades and the agricultural district of Palm Beach County, where it is very likely the Eastern Screech-Owl does not occur or occurs rarely due to a lack of habitat.

Although the Eastern Screech-Owl is common and widespread, its nocturnal habits presented a challenge to fieldworkers. Occasionally a screech-owl will answer a tape recording of its call during the day, however, most Atlas records were obtained during specific nighttime searches. Usually only a few minutes of playing a screech owl tape were required before a live owl answered the tape. Because this was considered territorial behavior, it was relatively easy to obtain "probable" breeding evidence for this species. However, it was much more difficult to confirm breeding. Hearsay data from local residents were valuable in this regard. So was information from wildlife rehabilitators, who receive hundreds of baby Eastern Screech-Owls each year. In fact, many of the confirmed breeding records in the central peninsula came from the Florida Audubon Society's Madalyn Baldwin Center for Birds of Prey in Orange County.

Bill Pranty

Eastern Screech-Owl

