



SOUTH COAST CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Protecting and Restoring at Risk Species and Ecological Communities on BC's South Coast

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Western Screech Owl *kennicottii* ssp.

Megascops kennicottii kennicottii

A member of the family Strigidae ("typical owls"), western forms were long thought to be one in the same species (conspecific) as Eastern Screech Owl (*M. asio*). It was not until the late 1960's that Western Screech Owl was designated as a separate species.



Adult from Fraser Valley Gord
Gadsden



Adult Laura Santry Wikipedia



Adult with ear tufts not easily visible
USFWS



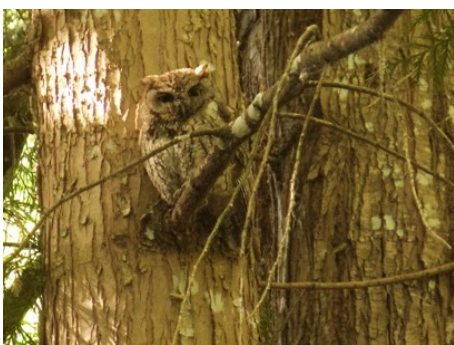
Juvenile ("Owlet") Dr. Lloyd Glen
Ingles



This species prefers intact riparian
habitat Pamela Zevit



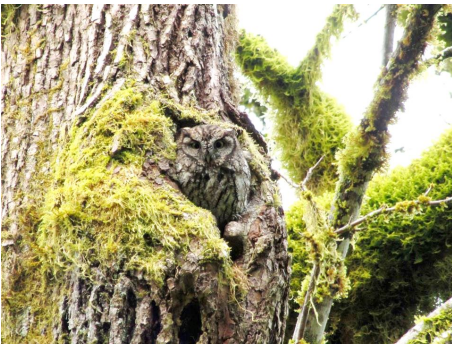
Adult in nest cavity G. Ferguson



Adult roosting against tree trunk G.
Ferguson



Owlet Camera Trap Codger



Adult in nest cavity Michelle Evelyn



Adult BC Creek Protection Society

Characteristics

Length 19-25.5 cm, Weight 120-305 g. A small owl with yellow eyes, a small beak and black eyebrow ridges that lead up in a “Y” configuration to short ear tufts on the corners of the head. The head is crowned with a triangular russet and black cap that follows the eyebrow ridge to the ear tufts. Ear tufts may not always be visible, depending on the owl's 'mood'. A master of arboreal camouflage, the white to pale-grey plumage is streaked with black and brown making it difficult to see against tree trunks or cavities where it generally roosts and nests. The coastal subspecies tends to have greater brown colouration while the interior subspecies is greyer. As with most raptors, females are generally larger and heavier than males.

Status

Global Status:	G5T4
Provincial Status:	S2S3
SARA Status:	Threatened
BC List Status:	Blue (Considered to be of Special Concern)

Similar Species

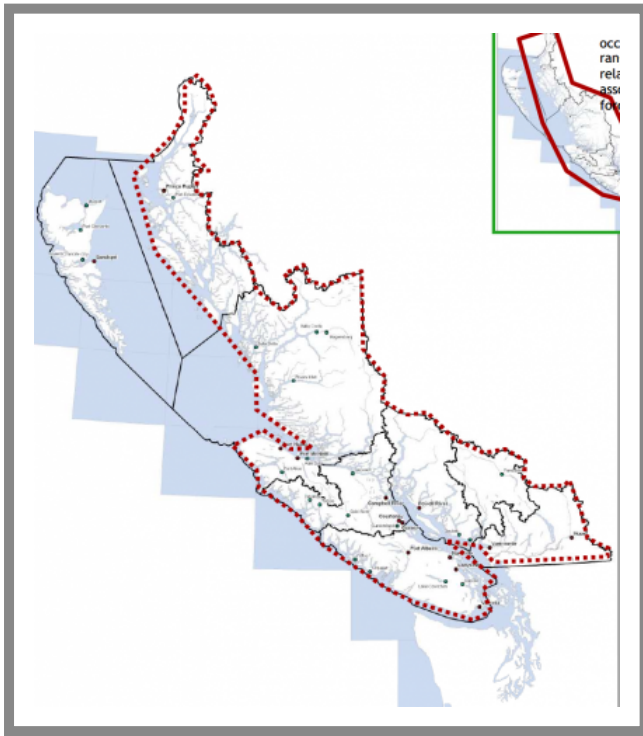


Great-horned Owl Brednan Ially Wikipedia
Long-eared Owl Angus Leonard Wikipedia

There are a number of owl species that co-occur with the Western Screech Owl on the South Coast, some with ear tufts and similar camouflage patterning (e.g. Long-eared and Great-horned Owl) but all are significantly larger (2-3 times the size) than Western Screech Owl.

Ecology

Range



Western Screech Owl *kennicottii* subspecies (*Megascops kennicottii kennicottii*), potential occurrence range for the Coast Region. Elevation 0–600 m. The coastal subspecies is distributed throughout the Coast Region including Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands (absent from Haida Gwaii). This subspecies was once considered to be one of the most common small owls in southwest BC but has shown a strong decline since the 1990's, especially near settlement areas in the Fraser Lowlands and southern Vancouver Island. Recent inventory work on the South Coast (2015-2017) indicated the subspecies appeared to still be relatively abundant in the Pemberton area, but "less common in Whistler, Squamish and the Chilliwack area".

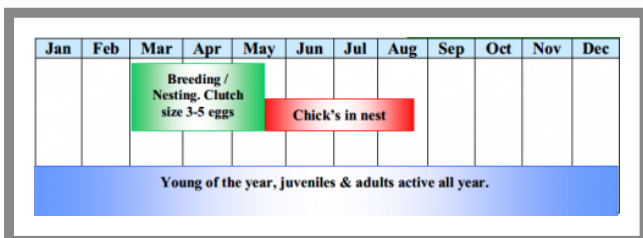
Habitat

While this subspecies is primarily associated with riparian or low elevation forests, it can also be found in treed urban and suburban environments, and at the edge of forested habitats close to wetlands or fields. Western Screech Owl is a secondary cavity nester, dependent on other species such as Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Flicker to excavate nesting cavities. This owl will also readily use nest boxes. Breeding territories are closely associated with riparian or low-mid elevation forest habitats and must contain at least two suitable cavities which are used for both nesting and roosting. Where optimal habitat occurs, home range sizes can be very small, and are generally assessed at 2.5–10 ha. Young of the year disperse from the natal area, with females traveling about three times as far as males (about 15 km vs. 5 km) in the first 3 months of dispersal. In British Columbia, nests ranged from 1.2 to 12.2 m above ground; all nests reported were in trees >25 cm dbh. Day roosts are usually in deciduous trees with a mean height of 21.2 m, at an average of 4.6 m high. The tree density around roosts tends to be greater than in the surrounding forest.

Diet

A non-specific predator, this subspecies preys on small animals, including mice, shrews, birds, insects, frogs, salamanders, crayfish, fish, and a range of insects and even worms. Western Screech Owl has also been observed scavenging from small mammal carcasses in California, a behaviour that may be more common than is currently recognized.

Life Cycle



Breeding begins at one year, birds are monogamous and breed every year.

Threats

➤ Direct predation by larger owls (i.e. Barred and Great-horned Owl) and competition for prey resources is considered to be the single greatest factor contributing to this subspecies decline on the Coast Region.

➤ Secondary factors which may exacerbate impacts from Barred Owl competition include loss of preferred nesting features and prey availability (tied to forest structure), disturbance from urban and rural development and logging and competition for nesting ca

Conservation and Management

Recovery approaches developed for the macfarlanei subspecies should be investigated for transferable conservation and management objectives that can be applied to the coastal form. Integrate complimentary measures found in the "COSEWIC assessment and status report on the Western Screech-Owl kennicottii subspecies Megascops kennicottii kennicottii and the Western Screech-Owl macfarlanei subspecies Megascops kennicottii macfarlanei in Canada" (2012), "Best Management Practices for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development" in British Columbia and the Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife Western Screech Owl Megascops (syn Otus) kennicottii macfarlanei Accounts V. 2004. Assess, inventory and monitor using methodology set out in the RISC standards # 11 Inventory Methods for Raptors (Version 2.0). This subspecies is listed under the Federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) and is subject to protections and prohibitions under the BC Wildlife Act. Habitat for this species may also be governed under provincial and federal regulations including the Fish Protection Act and Federal Fisheries Act as well as Regional and local municipal bylaws.

Resources

Declining Numbers of Western Screech Owl in the Lower Mainland of BC

Observations of Two Species at Risk in Mainland Southwestern BC - Huttons Vireo & Western Screech Owl

Coastal Western Screech-owl Surveys and Habitat Assessment for Habitat Acquisition Trust Victoria, BC

The overall project goal is to identify sites suitable for the protection and/or improvement of habitat for the Western Screech-owl (Megascops kennicottii kennicottii).

Our Owls, Our Neighbours Being Owl Wise HAT's Western Screech Owl Project

Stewardship Series Issue 5: Fall 2016.

For further information see

Develop With Care 2014 Factsheet 12 Western Screech Owl

Scroll down to the bottom of the DWC site to access the factsheet

Owl Nest Box Monitoring - Fraser Valley

In 2016, in collaboration with Madrone Environmental and other interested biologists, the Fraser Valley Conservancy implemented a Western Screech-owl nest box program to provide alternate nest sites in forested habitats where natural nest cavities were lacking. This program was based on a similar successful program initiated on Vancouver Island. The intent is to install nest boxes and monitor their use along with population data, with all the data shared in an online database.

BC Species and Ecosystems Explorer: Species and Ecosystems Search

A source for authoritative conservation information on thousands of plants and animals and hundreds of ecological communities in BC. From here connect to all provincial and federal recovery plans (including the SARA Registry), COSEWIC (Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada), Identified Wildlife guidance and conservation requirements for specific species and ecological communities of conservation concern impacted by forestry activities) and links to E-Flora and E-Fauna (the Electronic Atlas of the Plants and Wildlife of British Columbia).

British Columbia's Coast Region Species & Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

A joint venture resource providing comprehensive information on a range of species and ecological communities specific to the Coast Region of BC (including the South, Central and North Coast, Vancouver Island and Haida Gwaii).

Develop With Care Guidelines (see specific raptor BMP's and WESO factsheet))

Environmental guidelines for urban and rural land development in BC.

Species at Risk & Local Governments a Primer for BC

Learn what species are at risk in your area, search by name, habitat type, regional district and forest district.

Sources

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- Western Screech-Owl, *macfarlanei* subspecies Recovery Team. 2008. Recovery strategy for the Western Screech-Owl, *macfarlanei* subspecies (*Megascops kennicottii macfarlanei*) in British Columbia. Prepared for the B.C. Ministry of Environment, Victoria, BC. 14 pp.

Credits

First edition prepared in 2010 by Pamela Zevit RPBio for the South Coast Conservation Program (SCCP) with Jamie Fenneman in partnership with: International Forest Products (Interfor), Capacity Forestry (CapFor). Original funding was made possible through the **Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)** .

2nd Edition 2014 by Isabelle Houde, RPBio in consultation with the SCCP. Content updated by the Pamela Zevit April 2017

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Links

- [1] <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/natural-resource-stewardship/natural-resource-standards-and-guidance/best-management-practices/develop-with-care>
- [2] <http://fraservalleyconservancy.ca/stewardship/owl-nest-box-monitoring>
- [3] <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/conservation-data-centre/explore-cdc-data/species-and-ecosystems-explorer>
- [4] <http://www.geog.ubc.ca/biodiversity/factsheets/>
- [5] <http://www.speciesatrisk.bc.ca/>
- [6] <http://www.sfiprogram.org/>
- [7] <mailto:info@sccp.ca>