



British Columbia's Coast Region Species and Ecological Communities of Conservation Concern

SOUTH COAST CONSERVATION PROGRAM

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

SPECIES PROFILE: Western Screech Owl *kennicottii* subspecies (*Megascops kennicottii kennicottii*)

Status Global: G5T4 Provincial: S3 SARA: 1-SC Special Concern BC List: Blue

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 (*O. asio*). It was not until the late 1960's that Western Screech Owl was designated as a separate species. Eight subspecies are recognized of which two, *O. k. kennicottii* (coastal) and *O. k. macfarlanei* (interior) are found in BC.



Adult



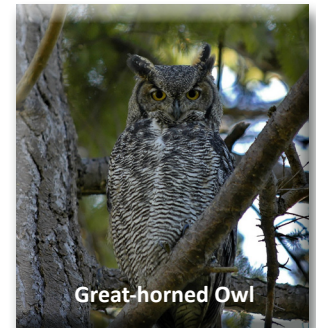
Juvenile

Characteristics (things to look for)

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. 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. Northern subspecies are often larger and heavier than the southern subspecies.

Looks like (Similar)

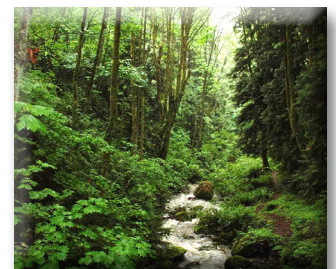
There are a number of arboreal owl species, some with ear tufts and similar camouflage patterning (e.g. Long-eared and Great-horned Owl) but all are significantly larger than Western Screech Owl.



Great-horned Owl

Habitat

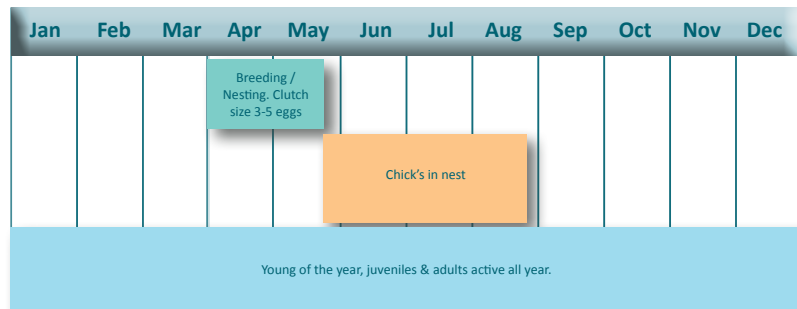
This species is generally found at lower elevations, in forested habitats often near water (i.e. riparian communities). Along the coast it occurs in coniferous and mixed (deciduous or coniferous) forests and is often associated with Broadleaf Maple and Black Cottonwood in riparian zones. This subspecies 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 travelling 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.

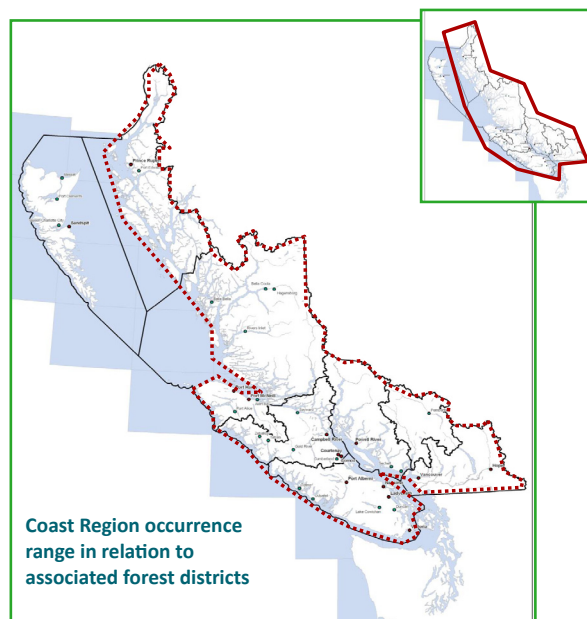
Life Cycle



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

Range

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.



Threats

- Direct predation by larger owls (i.e. Barred, Great-horned Owl) and raccoons, and competition for prey resources is considered to be the single greatest factor contributing to this subspecies decline on the Coast Region.
- Loss of preferred nesting features and prey availability (tied to forest structure) due to disturbance from urban and rural development and logging, and due to competition for nesting cavities with other introduced species such as Eastern Grey Squirrel and European Starling.

Conservation/ Management

Apply conservation and management objectives as set-out 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. ”, and “the Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife Western Screech Owl *Otus kennicottii macfarlanei* Accounts V. 2004”. Integrate complementary objectives, recommendations and assessment methods found in “Best Management Practices for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia” Inventory and monitoring resources include standardized methods RISC standards # 11 Inventory Methods for Raptors (Version 2.0). For further details on conservation and management objectives for this species, please consult the above noted resources, references provided or contact provincial and federal agencies.

This species is listed under the federal Species at Risk Act (SARA) and is subject to protections and prohibitions under the BC Wildlife Act and is Identified Wildlife under the Forest and Range Practices 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.

Sources

B.C. Conservation Data Centre. 2016. [Internet]. Species Summary: *Megascops kennicottii kennicottii*.
B.C. MoE. - B.C. Ministry of Environment. 2013. Recovery plan for the Western Screech-Owl, *kennicottii* subspecies (*Megascops kennicottii kennicottii*) in British Columbia. B.C. Ministry of Environment, Victoria, BC. 23 pp. - Cannings, R. 2004. [Internet] Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife Western Screech Owl *Otus kennicottii macfarlanei* Accounts V. 2004. - Central Okanagan Terrestrial Ecosystem & Wildlife Habitat Mapping Project. 2001. [Internet] Species account for Western Screech Owl *Otus kennicottii macfarlanei*. - COSEWIC 2012. 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. Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. Ottawa. xii + 30 pp. - Davis, H. and R. Weir. 2008. [Internet] Western Screech-Owl Conservation along the Shuswap River Final Report. Artemis Wildlife Consultants. [BCRP Project # 07.W.SHU.01]. - Demarchi, M.W. and M.D. Bently. 2005. [Internet]. Best Management Practices for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia. B.C. Ministry of Environment, Victoria, B.C. MoE BMP Series. - Elliot, K. 2006. [Internet] Declining numbers of Western Screech Owls in the lower Mainland of BC. British Columbia Field Ornithologists - British Columbia Birds Journal Vol. 14. - Lewis, D. P. 2010. [Internet] [Updated April 11 2007] The Owl Pages Western Screech Owl - *Megascops kennicottii*. - Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks Resources Inventory Branch. [Internet]. 2001. RISC standards # 11 Inventory Methods for Raptors (Version 2.0). - Robertson, I. et al. 2000. [Internet] Observations of Two Species at Risk in Mainland Southwestern British Columbia: Hutton's Vireo and Western Screech-Owl. Proceedings of a Conference on the Biology and Management of Species and Habitats at Risk, Kamloops, B.C. Volume One. B.C. Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, Victoria, B.C. and University College of the Cariboo, Kamloops, B.C. 490 pp. - 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.

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Updated and revised by: Isabelle Houde, RPBio in consultation with the SCCP. Part of the National Conservation Plan, this project was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada. Dans le cadre du Plan de Conservation National, ce projet a été réalisé avec l'appui financier du Gouvernement du Canada.

Every effort has been made to ensure content accuracy. Comments or corrections should be directed to the South Coast Conservation Program: info@sccp.ca. Content updated January 2016.

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