

### Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia



*Are you planning a development on your property? If your property includes, or is near to nest trees or feeding areas for the Western Screech-owl, this fact sheet will provide you with important information about complying with the law and protecting this species while still benefiting from the enjoyment and value of your property.*

The Western Screech-owl is a small owl which occurs along British Columbia's Pacific coast and in the southern interior. Screech-owls require natural cavities for nesting and roosting, which are excavated from dead or dying trees by other species such as woodpeckers.

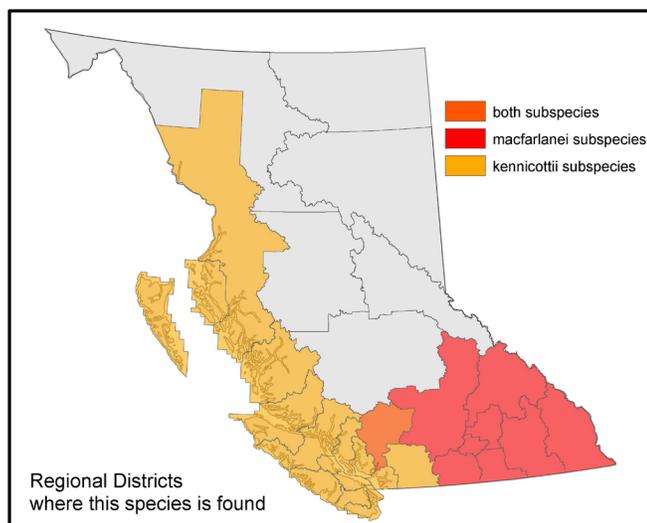
The owls usually lay 2–3 eggs between mid-March and late May. The female incubates eggs and broods nestlings, whereas the male delivers food to the female and the young. Screech-owls hunt by waiting in ambush on low-lying branches for prey to appear. The diet of screech-owls is incredibly varied, including small mammals such as mice and rats, as well as songbirds, insects, crayfish, frogs, and fish.

#### AT RISK

Once considered relatively common, Western Screech-owls have recently declined dramatically in B.C. The coastal subspecies is considered of **Special Concern** due to their vulnerability to human activities on the south coast and the interior subspecies is listed by COSEWIC as **Endangered**. Screech-owls are particularly threatened by urban and agricultural development and forestry practices in low elevation, mixed coniferous-deciduous forests—which provide prime habitat for this fascinating bird. In addition to habitat loss, Western Screech-owls may also be threatened by Barred Owls that are displacing screech-owls from their historic habitats as they expand their range.

#### LEGALLY PROTECTED

It is an offense to possess, take, injure, molest, or destroy a bird or its eggs, or the nests of birds when occupied by a bird or egg (B.C. Wildlife Act, [Section 34](#)). A permit from [FrontCounter BC](#) is required before attempting to capture, handle, or move this species, or to remove or modify a tree or snag containing an active screech-owl nest.



## DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

More detailed guidelines for protecting the birds and their habitats are provided in *Develop with Care 2014: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia* and *Guidelines for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia (2013)*.

- ☑ Protect nest sites. Leave a protective buffer around active nests of at least 1.5 tree lengths in urban areas, and of at least 200 m in rural areas. An additional 200 m 'no disturbance' buffer is recommended during the breeding season (March 15–August 31), when the female and nestlings are even more susceptible to human disturbance.
- ☑ Retain existing habitats and features. Preserve any trees or snags with cavities that could be used by screech-owls for nesting. Protection of dead and dying trees is particularly important, as woodpeckers use these to create nest cavities which can later be used by screech-owls and many other wildlife species. Look for opportunities to protect buffered nests that are close proximity to continuous forested patches, of sufficient size (5–30 ha), that will provide essential feeding,



nesting and roosting habitat for screech-owls. Protected forest patches should be surrounded by a 100 m vegetated buffer that provides suitable foraging habitat.

- ☑ Restore availability of nest cavities. Replace any nest cavities that were damaged or lost with suitable nest boxes. Although they are not an ideal substitute for natural cavities, nest boxes can provide nesting and roosting sites for screech-owls. Refer to *Guidelines for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia (2013)* for information on the design and construction of Western Screech-owl nest boxes.
- ☑ Protect roost and perch sites. Protect trees, snags, and other structures where Western Screech-owls are regularly observed perching or roosting.
- ☑ Check with your local government to see if they have a Development Permit Area or bylaw that protects nest trees and buffer zones in your area.

**For more information:** <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/wld/BMP/bmpintro.html>

*Develop with Care 2014: Environmental Guidelines for Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia*  
*Guidelines for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia (2013)*

*Raptor Webcam Guidelines: An Addendum to Best Management Practices for Raptor Conservation during Urban and Rural Land Development in British Columbia*

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