



# BCT Stewardship Journal: September 2025

## Species Spotlight: Eastern Screech Owl (*Megascops asio*)

If you find yourself out and about after sunset listening to the night come to life, you might hear a trill that sounds more like a horse-whinny. This critter is not a horse, not a racoon, but an owl! The Eastern Screech Owl is an elusive night dweller and gives less of a “screech” but more of a soft, eerie warble.

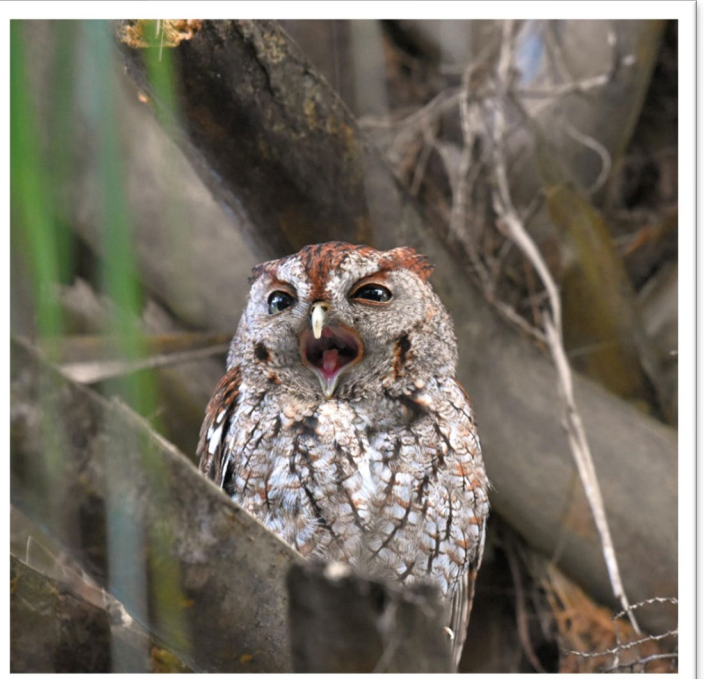
At just 6-10 inches tall, these pint-sized predators are often mistaken for a pinecone with eyes when perched motionless on a branch. Perfect camouflage is their specialty, and comes in handy when preying on mice, insects, frogs, and even the occasional small bird. Fall is one of the best times to hear or see them on Cape Cod. Juveniles are out exploring, adults are defending territories, and with the leaves thinning out, there is a better chance at spotting one roosting in a tree cavity.

Hearing these little owls is far more common than spotting them, which makes a sighting all the more special. Here are some tips to spot or hear a Screech Owl in Brewster:

1. Head out at dusk. Screech owls are most active right after sunset. A walk through a wooded area might reward you with a glimpse or a haunting call.
2. Listen for the whinny. Unlike the hoots of the larger Great Horned Owl, screech owls give off a descending whinny or a soft trill. From experience, it’s the kind of sound that sticks out from the rest!
3. Keep your eyes on the trees. Look for hollow stumps, standing dead trees, or old woodpecker holes. Screech owls love to cozy up in nooks where they can hide out during the day.
4. Install an owl box. If nooks are hard to come by in your neck of the woods, an owl box in your backyard is a great step at inviting these little critters to stop by.

Like many species, Eastern Screech Owls face challenges from habitat loss, pesticides, and window collisions. But they’re incredibly adaptable and have proven they can live harmoniously near humans. As resilient as these owls are, we must still do our part! Keeping dead wood standing, preserving forest habitat, and staying away from rodenticides and pesticides are all ways we can continue living in harmony with these little feathered friends. In return, these owls will help keep the rodent populations in check.

Next time you find yourself at a campfire or walking your dog in the evening, take a moment to listen. If you hear that chilling whinny from the woods, tip your hat to one of Cape Cod’s smallest, spookiest, and most endearing nocturnal residents: the Eastern Screech Owl.



*Kyle Matera/Audubon Photography Awards*