

Eastern Screech-Owl

(*Otus asio*)

FIELD MARKS: Tufts present, eyes yellow, bill yellow/green or yellow/white. Facial disk gray/white surrounded by black fringe. Ventrally, pale brown to whitish with scattered dark brown streaks extending from chest along sides and flanks. Dorsally, buffy/gray throughout. Also, eastern screech-owls inhabiting deciduous forests of the eastern United States have a rufous (rust) color phase. A specimen of this color phase has yet to be secured in Montana. **SIZE:** eight to 10 inches. **WEIGHT:** six to seven ounces. **SIMILAR SPECIES:** Western screech-owl is similar in size, although slightly larger. Bill black to gray/green or gray/black. The overall

plumage is gray. **HABITAT:** Primarily cottonwood bottoms. **VOICE:** Two parts: First part, a quavering, drawn out ascending whistle, "Wheeeee...", similar to a horse's whinny. Second part, a vibrating low whistle, "Quohohoho...", run together. Calls are short. **NATURAL HISTORY:** Begins nesting in March. Nests in natural cavities or woodpecker holes. Clutch size three to seven. Incubation approximately 26 days. Young fledge at approximately 30 days. Resident throughout year. **FOOD HABITS:** Primarily small mammals and a few birds. **STATUS:** Distribution poorly known in Montana. Known to occur on the plains east of Continental Divide. However, how close this species extends its range to the Rocky Mountain Front is one of the most interesting owl questions in the state.

