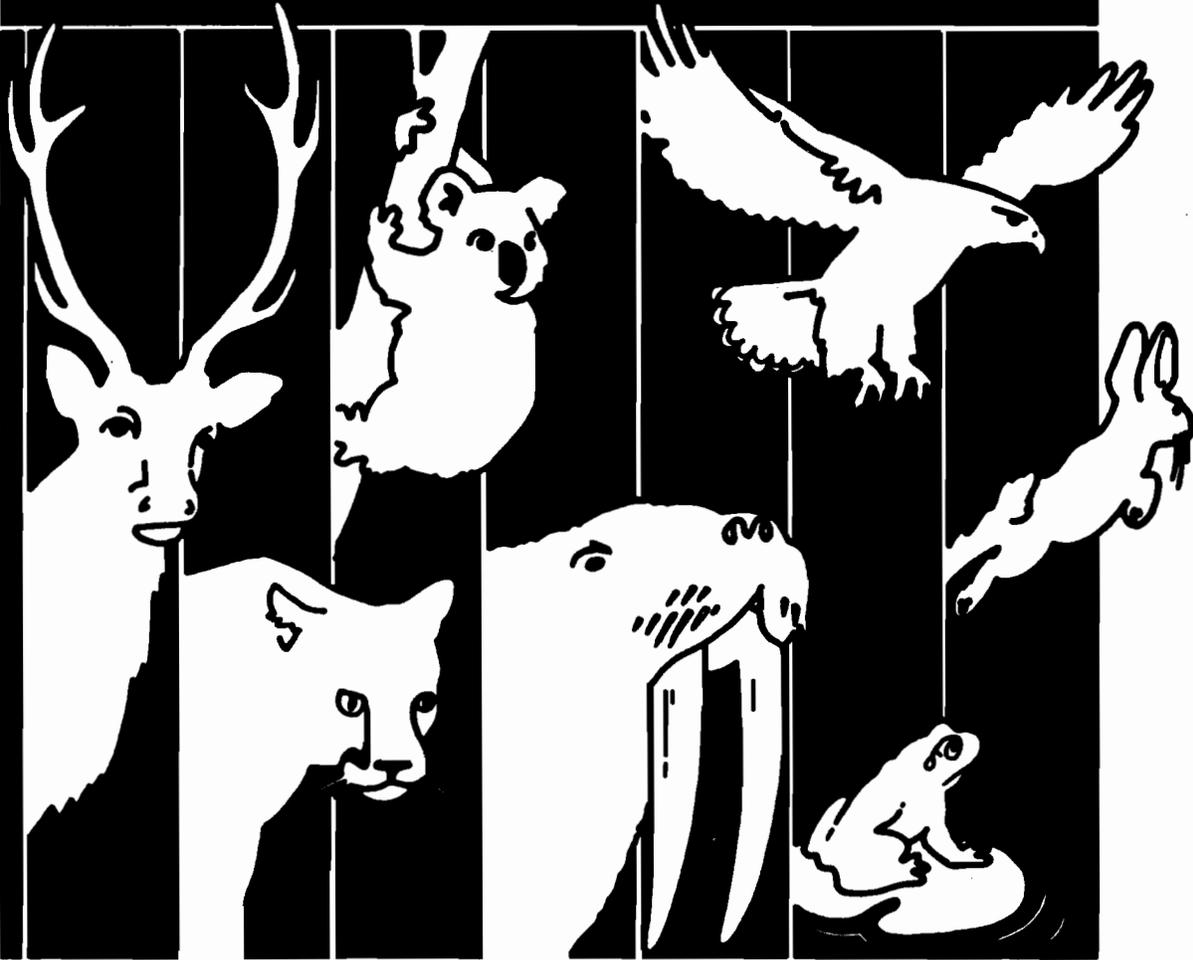


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BOOK REVIEW

The Eastern Screech Owl: Life History, Ecology and Behavior in the Suburbs and Countryside, by Frederick R. Gehlbach. 1994. Texas A&M University Press, Drawer C, College Station, TX 77843-4354. xiv + 302p. Available from the publisher at \$45.00 (cloth: ISBN 0-89096-609-5).

For ornithologists and ecologists alike, Fred Gehlbach's book promises to hold both interest and information value as a comprehensive study of the eastern screech owl (*Otus asio hasbroucki*). Gehlbach was intrigued with screech owls as a boy and encouraged as an undergraduate by William J. Hamilton, who underscored that in-depth studies of familiar backyard species can be as fascinating as those in exotic sites. Correspondence with another owl-aficionado, the late H. N. Southern, inspired the author's long-term study of screech owls in a woodland landscape in central Texas and led him to provide nest boxes to enhance his access and sample size.

This book is based on observations over a 25-year period—beginning in 1967, with intensive study during an 11-year period (1976-1987)—in Texas south of Waco, where Gehlbach teaches at Baylor University. The study represents observations on 659 screech owls, covering several generations of birds and entire lives of many individuals. Gehlbach compares screech owl nesting behavior in a rural versus suburban setting and includes chapters on food supplies and predation tactics; egg-laying, incubation, and parental behavior; vocalizations; and population structure and flux. He discusses why screech owls are widespread across the eastern half of North America and why they succeed among people in suburban environments, where they adapt as easily to mailboxes and porch columns as to natural tree cavities.

The book mixes two approaches: on the one hand, the dense style of a technical book in which the professional biologist can find information on many aspects of screech owl behavior, life history, and population, including tables, figures, summary statistics, results of statistical comparisons, and experimental tests of hypotheses. On the other hand, each chapter begins with and includes vivid visual images, personal experiences, and thoughtful reflections to draw in the general reader, bridging the interesting topic to the technical details and making the information accessible to a wider audience. The reader is impressed with Dr. Gehlbach's love of his subject, his devotion to long-term study, and his care in presenting the work to his fellow ornithologists, ecologists, and all those interested in wildlife and conservation.

It will be a useful reference because of its wealth of information on all aspects of screech owl life history. It is well documented and, in addition to its 10 chapters, includes 10 appendices with information on types of food supplies, bird species that mob screech owls, a daily chronology of nestling development, and a selection of edited field notes to provide background for each chapter. The book is thoroughly referenced and indexed. *The Eastern Screech Owl* will be read with interest by those with an interest in long-term, in-depth studies and those who love charming stories about remarkable birds with strong personalities and interesting behavior.—Caldwell Hahn, National Biological Service, Patuxent Environmental Science Center, 11410 American Holly Drive, Laurel, Maryland 20708-4015 (tel:301-497-5653; fax:301-497-5624; e-mail:caldwell_hahn@nbs.gov).

