

While known to be common (for a small owl) in parts of adjoining San Mateo and Marin Counties, the "California Coast" Western Screech Owl (*Otus kennicottii bedirei*) has always been considered rare in or absent from the city and county of San Francisco.

A 1956 photograph of a Screech Owl sitting inside a large cavity in a Eucalyptus tree "in Golden Gate Park" by the late Grace Miller of Inverness and occasional birds "heard in the Presidio" are the only allusions to the ^{species} presence in San Francisco away from the area at Inspiration Point in the Presidio.

For each of the past five years, Western Screech Owls have been recorded on the San Francisco Christmas Bird Census (CBC) in the swale to the east and south of the Inspiration Point parking lot. Usually a single bird was noted but on at least one occasion "several" individuals were calling at once. Because of the nature of a CBC it is most likely that surveys were less than thorough. Although normally no ornithologists survey for owls at this locality other than the single morning in late December, Alan Hopkins and his Bird-A-Thon team made one try in late April 1991 and found the species present.

Because Western Screech Owls have been present at Inspiration Point for five consecutive winters, because the only try in spring was successful, and because two birds were found on 1 August 1994, it appears likely that there are individuals resident (this race of the species is considered to be absolutely sedentary) at Inspiration Point throughout the year and a small, reproducing population is quite possible.

17 June - At 1800-drive from Point Reyes to Inspiration Point in the Presidio at San Francisco. I walked carefully through $\pm$ 60% of the survey area looking for tree cavities, feathers, pellets and owls. Most of the conifers (pines, redwoods and firs) are living and I saw no suitable holes. There was no other evidence found but this is no surprise due to the mixed composition of the leaf litter (not easy to spot small feathers) and the fact that pellets from small owls are small and obscure.

I stayed in the area until 2130 playing tape and vocalizing imitations with no response. However, the 20 m.p.h. fog-wind and blowing fog would certainly hamper detection.

Inspiration Point is above some very nice bird (and feral cat - 2 major feeding stations) habitat and houses many species. I located the active nest of a pair of Olive-sided Flycatchers and noted many newly fledged: White-crowned (Nuttall's) Sparrows (10); Dark-eyed Junco (16); Song Sparrow (4); Downy Woodpecker (3). Other birds noted: Pygmy Nuthatch (20); Hutton's Vireo (3); Orange-crowned Warbler (1 male); Mourning Dove (4); Allen's Hummingbird (5); Anna's Hummingbird (3); Brewer's Blackbird (10); Red-shouldered Hawk (1 adult female); House Finch (30); Purple Finch (2); Scrub Jay (1). Of course more species and individuals would be detected on a calm morning and many more species on a morning during migration.

9 July 1994 - P.M. survey at Inspiration Point. A single pellet found appeared to be an oral casting from a small owl. It contained bits from the elitra of a large beetle and bits (including mandible and legs) of a Potato Bug. Again, the 20 knot wind caused an unsatisfactory survey. Nonetheless, no screech owls were detected between dusk and 2100.

30 July 1994 - A P.M. visit to Inspiration Point to survey for Screech Owls was, again, severely affected by fog-wind. Although I wandered the area, playing tape and whistling, no owls were detected. Because of the confused wind (up to 25 m.p.h.) I do not consider this an acceptable census and will try again some early-morning this week. This wind causes inaudibility for both broadcasting and receiving responses.

I did have a close-encounter with one homeless person when I almost stepped on him in a dense section of the Redwood grove. He told me he hadn't heard any owls but had seen a "Chicken Hawk"

right on the trail. I apologized for getting in his space and he invited me to spend the night. I graciously declined and left the survey site at 2145.

1 August 1994 - A pre-dawn visit to Inspiration Point finally produced Screech Owls - one drawn into my whistling and tape playing in the redwood grove (seen well 30' for 60 seconds) and another (female? higher voice) 1/2 mile south. Finally, conditions were calm and perfect for census. The birds were encountered between 0512 and 0522. A male Great-horned Owl was calling loudly from the Eucs in the canyon just south of the parking lot.

Alan Hopkins tells me he found a possible Screech Owl cavity in a Eucalyptus in the swale east of the point.

Western Screech owl detections
1 August 1994. Rich Skallcup

