

## Nature



Contributed photo

After acquiring two Owl Shacks from Nacogdoches ornithologist Cliff Shackelford, Keith and Pat Grogan found a welcome surprise on Christmas Day.

# Owls 'shack' up; welcome young ones

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When Keith Grogan purchased a couple owl houses for his yard last fall, he wasn't too sure if they would attract their intended visitors.

"I didn't know if we'd get anything. I thought 'OK, we might get an owl,'" said Grogan. But, instead, over the course of the past 10 months, he and his wife, Pat, have wound up with an entire family of them.

The Grogans first noticed their Owl Shack, a backyard owl house constructed by Nacogdoches ornithologist Cliff Shackelford, was inhabited on Christmas Day.

Grogan said a reddish-brown screech owl appeared in one of his two shacks, and he and his wife named it Mrs. Claus in light of the holiday. An Owl Shack is a rectangular cedar box built to

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hang from trees to give a screech owl a makeshift home. Grogan said they soon discovered the owl was actually male, and he wasn't alone. The Grogans named his female companion Sarah and spent many afternoons watching the two of them perched on the owl shacks. Then, a couple weeks ago, while watching the two owls, the Grogans noticed what appeared to be a little head in the shack that overlooked their pool. The shack turned out to contain not just one, but three baby owls, and the couple was ecstatic about being able to watch them as they grew, particularly when the parents scouted their backyard for food to give to the babies.

"We'd sit under the fan and watch them," he said. "It was a lot of fun to just watch."

Shackelford explained that like any youngster, baby screech owls are curious and will perch on the edge of the shack to see "their bright new world." He said adult owls use the shacks to escape the cold winter until spring, when if an owner is lucky, like the Gro-

gans, the shack will become a nursery for the owl's offspring.

He said while some people might be cautious of having a screech owl in their backyard, the owls are great backyard pest control agents, taking care of everything from mice to wood roaches. They will not attack, he said, adding a full-grown screech owl is about the size of a 12 ounce can of Coke.

Shackelford said the adult owls, as they demonstrated on a recent Wednesday, perch in the canopy of the trees while their babies rest in the owl shack. In the late afternoon, the babies will begin to pop up on the edge of the owl shack and look around and then go back into the shack for a nap before dusk. After approximately 30 days, they will fledge and leave the shack for good, he said.

"There was no way for us to know then (when we got the Owl Shack) that we would have two owls," said Grogan. "And then, when the babies came, it was just like 'wow!'"

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