

Nature About the Farm

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Mice Eating Hawks—Currant Worms—Onion Maggots.

The editor of this department will be glad to identify for subscribers any specimens of natural history sent to this office for that purpose and will answer any questions on the subject that may be asked through The Farming World.

BIRD LIFE—HAWKS VS. FIELD MICE

Spring migration for this year is nearly over. All the land birds have arrived and those that go farther north to breed have passed on. The last of the shore birds are now rushing through, and by about the tenth of this month the Turnstones which always form the rear guard of this army of strong winged wanderers, will have left us for their arctic breeding grounds.

In our last issue I particularly referred to the value of the owls as destroyers of meadow mice, a plague of which seems to be impending. If these mischievous creatures do increase so as to overrun the country, it will mean fearful loss, if not actual ruin to a great many farmers and fruit growers. We can however, if we act in time, avoid this, by protecting the natural enemies of these animals, which are sure to gather where they become abundant, for the purpose of feeding on them. All the owls are emphatically mouse eaters. Crows also are very fond of mice and pick up a good many in their foraging, but the large hawks are perhaps the most important checks upon the excessive increase of the whole family of mice. Unfortunately there are three species of hawks which occasionally make raids upon the poultry yards, and because of the sins of these three, our farmers encourage the destruction of every kind of hawk we have. They seem to think that the bigger the hawk the more mischief it will do to their fowls and the more anxious they are to have it killed, whereas the contrary is the case; for all our larger hawks are free from the vice of chicken killing and feed almost entirely on mice, frogs, toads and grasshoppers. The hawks which are injurious by reason of the destruction they work in the poultry yard are the Goshawk, Cooper's hawk and the sharp-shinned hawk, of these the Goshawk is the largest. It is a winter visitor only in southern Ontario and is not often abundant. Cooper's hawk and the sharp-shin are both small hawks rather longer than a tame pigeon, but not quite as large bodied. With these however I will deal later on.

The hawks which are beneficial are the rough-legged hawk (see illustration in last issue), red tailed hawk, red shouldered hawk, broad winged hawk, marsh hawk and sparrow hawk. This last is the only small hawk amongst them,

but may always be distinguished from all others by its bright, chestnut red back and tail and its habit of hanging poised on quickly beating wings over the fields as it searches for its favorite food, mice and large grasshoppers.

The first five are usually known as "hen hawks," possibly because they never kill hens. They are all large, slow, heavy flying birds, most of them having the habit of sailing in wide circles high in the air. The rough-legged hawk is the largest of our Canadian hawks and one that deserves the greatest consideration and protection from every farmer. I doubt if this so called "Hen Hawk" ever killed a hen, or in fact a bird of any kind in this country. They will, like the rest of



The Marsh Hawk

these large hawks when pressed by hunger, eat carrion, but though I have examined the stomach contents of a great many during the last thirty-five years, yet I have never found a trace of a feather in one of them; frogs and grasshoppers at times, but mice in abundance, varying in quantity from some fur and a few bones to seven whole ones. Just how many they require every day, I have never been able to ascertain, but as digestion is very rapid in birds of this class they must eat a great many.

Perhaps the most easily recognized and therefore the best known of all these hawks, is the marsh hawk. It is usually to be seen skimming low over the meadows, hunting for food. Every little while its flight will be suddenly checked and it will hang poised over something which has caught its quick eye, then drop into the grass and capture a mouse or perhaps a frog for it feeds on both; though in my experience mice have always predominated. I have found as many as eight in one stomach and four or five quite frequently. These birds hunt and feed with but few intermissions from daylight until dark, so that the number of

mice killed by them must be enormous, and so far I have never seen nor heard of their having attacked domestic poultry of any kind. They will sometimes take a meal off a dead duck they may find lying in the marshes and will occasionally kill small birds which frequent the same places but not often. Although these hawks are constantly engaged in protecting our crops, they are continually destroyed by mischievous persons who must shoot everything that has life in it. So long as this is permitted, we shall suffer loss from the ravages of the little animals, the numbers of which it is the function of the hawks to keep in check.

CURRENT WORMS—ONION MAGGOTS

The larvae of the currant saw fly commonly known as the currant worm is exceedingly abundant and troublesome this season; fortunately they are not at all difficult to get rid of. The simplest and best remedy is powdered white Hellebore in the proportion of one ounce of Hellebore to three gallons of water. Sprinkle this well over the bushes with a common garden watering pot and it will kill the insects in a short time. The insect which produces the currant worms does not seem to be generally known. It is one of the saw flies. The body of the male fly is black above with a few dull yellow spots, and it is yellowish below, legs bright yellow, length about one fourth of an inch. The female is rather larger and has a dull yellow body. The larvae are so well known that I need not describe them, when full grown they crawl under dead leaves on the ground or go just beneath the surface of the soil and there spin a tough oval cocoon, within which they pass the pupa state. In about two weeks the majority will emerge and lay eggs to produce a second brood. They are rather irregular in their transformation, some of them developing much more rapidly than others. If prompt attention is paid to the first brood, not much damage is likely to be inflicted by the second.

The onion maggot is also very troublesome just now. I have seen many crops badly injured by them. The simplest and most effective remedy is soap and water. One quart of soft soap to two gallons of water applied plentifully immediately after hoeing or stirring the soil in the rows will be found effective. Of this insect I will say more in next issue.

A most excellent bulletin on the pea weevil has just been issued by the Ontario Agricultural College, the work of Profs. C. A. Zavitz and Wm. Lochead. This should be studied carefully by every farmer and the advice given followed.

The recent rains will help the small fruit crop and insure a large yield of that delicious delicacy the strawberry.