

THE BIRDS OF PREY OF NOVA SCOTIA.

BY J. BERNARD GILPIN, A.B., M.D., M.R.C.S.

These markings do not accord with the bright chestnut red with no bars, of ours, excepting the broad subterminal one. At the same time, Mr. Downe kept in confinement for several years a pair of red-tails which always kept the brownish bars on brownish red-tails, resembling Richardson's. Thus we have this buzzard in two forms. The warm southern form of Wilson and the paler arctic one of Richardson. The specimens in the Halifax Museum and private collections are all young birds, but agree exactly to Richardson's description in bill, length of primaries and legs and feet. I kept one of the southern forms in confinement for several years. The second year he lost the brown tail of the immature bird and developed a bright chestnut one. I fed him upon livers and raw meat, which he received on his bill, but immediately transferred to his feet, tearing it, from which he fed. On giving him a dead bird he instantly became excited, spreading out his wings and tail and bending over it, with erect crest and head plumage, as it was fixed to his perch by his claws. He usually tore the sides open, thrusting in his hooked bill and drawing out the intestines. His blood stained bill and feathers, with his continuous, guttural, angry cries, and piercing eye underneath its bony brow, showed for the time he was no poor captive tied with a string. The fish hawk (*P. halieetus*) stands out from the family so broadly that he almost deserves a family alone. Eagles are admitted carrion eaters, and there are ugly stories told about the noblest falcon, of preying on vermin and dead animals. He, of all, kills his prey. Should he drop a fish from his claws, his instincts are never to pick it up. His limbs are muscular to the extreme, scarcely covered by the shortest feathers, and his legs and claws immense for his size; the joints are so loose in their articulation as to have a side motion, and the toes so adjusted that they may work in pairs, like the parrots, two before and two behind; the proper hind toe small, in this particular approaching the owl. The very peculiar scales they are covered with, and the roughness of the sole, still further recedes it from the typical foot of the Falconidae. They breed in our forest some miles from the sea, but do not winter with us. He may be seen regularly hunting our estuaries and forest lakes. Now

gracefully soaring, and now falling prone as a stone into the water, and then emerging with a fish in his claws, heavily laden and seeking the forest. I never could observe if he went beneath the water, as everything was covered by the splash of water caused by his fall. It is asserted that he does, by men of science and by the practical observer. It must be a very powerful bird to rise loaded from beneath the wave. The rising sun caught me amongst the hills of St. Clements, one morning after a long night ride. The air was filled by dismal screeches, and I nearly broke my back twisting in my saddle till I saw right over my head a fish hawk heavily laden with a fish in his claws and a bald-headed eagle continually soaring above and pouncing down upon his back. In a moment the fish came diagonally falling, the level beams of the early sun glinting it with silver. The eagle dropt like a stone beneath it, catching it on its upturned claws, and flapped away, whilst the poor plundered hawk was heard screaming long after out of sight. The eagles are the last upon our list. The golden eagle (*A. chrysaetus*), the eagle of the ancients, the bird of Jove, remains the whole year, and nests with us. They are more rare than the bald-heads, a pair dominating over a very wide country. I have seen four, three of them alive, taken in traps, the fourth killed by a woman in Pictou County. One in captivity was a very bold bird, attacking everybody that approached him with his claws. This attack was so fierce that a calfskin boot would have soon been torn from your foot. The bold grandeur of its massive head, supported by a neck arched like a horse and adorned by shining and golden hackles, imposed itself upon you as the type of force and pride; and yet he was trapped. He was seeking dead meat, which he devours as well as carrion. In beauty and severity of expression he far surpasses the bald-head (*H. leucocephalus*), the only other eagle we have. Though he will eat carrion, and gorge himself over the carcass of a dead horse: though he will enter your gardens, and strike a pea fowl or Brahma pullet: yet he adds dead and stranded fish to his larder. Hence his abundance, and his fairness. He remains all year with us, especially about the shores of the Bay of Fundy, building his nest sometimes in trees, at other times on scraggy rocks. As usual, the perfect adults with milk-white tail and head are few in comparison with the brown and spotted white young,