

THE INSTRUCTOR.

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NATURAL HISTORY.



THE OWL.

Owls are birds of prey, distinguishable by their round head, a circular arrangement of feathers round each eye, the bill being hooked, and the nostrils being covered with bristly feathers.

These birds are of great service to farmers, by devouring mice and other small animals: the uninterrupted increase of which would be extremely injurious to the fruits of the harvest. The Rev. Gilbert White states, that he had paid considerable attention to the manner of life of a pair of white owls, which constantly bred under the eaves of the church. He says that, generally, about an hour before sunset they sallied forth in quest of mice; that he has often minuted the birds with his watch for an hour together, and found that the one or the other of them returned to the nest about once in five minutes, with a mouse in its claws.

Though serviceable in thus destroying mice, these birds also destroy young rabbits, hares, partridges, &c., for which they are execrated by sportsmen; and they sometimes enter pigeon-houses, where their ravenous propensities cause them to commit great devastations.

HORNED OWL.

It is during the placid serenity of a beautiful summer night, when the current of the water moves silently along, reflecting from the

smooth surface the silver radiance of the moon, and whence all else of animated nature seems sunk in repose, that the great horned owl, one of the Nimrods of the feathered tribes of our forest, may be sailing silently and rapidly on, intent on the destruction of the objects designed to form his food. The lone steersman on the descending boat observes the nocturnal hunter gliding on extended pinions across the river, sailing over one hill and then another, or suddenly sweeping downwards and again rising in the air like a moving shadow, now distinctly seen, and again mingling with the sombre shades of the surrounding woods, fading into obscurity. The bark has now floated to some distance, and is opposite the newly cleared patch of ground—the result of a quarter's first attempt at cultivation, in a place lately shaded by the trees of the forest.

The moon shone brightly on his hut, his slight fence, the newly planted orchard, and a tree, which, spared by the axe, serves as a roosting place for the scanty stock of poultry which the new comer has procured from some neighbour. Among them rests a turkey-hen, covering her offspring with extended wings. The great owl, with eyes as keen as those of a falcon, is now seen hovering above the place. He has already espied the quarry, and is sailing in wide circles meditating his plan of attack. The turkey-hen, which at another time might be sound asleep, is now, however, so intent on the care of her young brood, that she rises on her legs and purrs so loudly, as she opens her wings and spreads her tail, that she rouses her neighbours, the hens, together with their protector.

The cacklings which they at first emit soon become a general clamour. The squatter hears the uproar, and on his feet in an instant, rifle