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Birds of Prey

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THE Birds of Prey hold the same position among the feathered tribes as the lion, the tiger, the hyena, and other carnivorous races among mammiferous quadrupeds. Their general appearance is indicative of the ferocity of their nature, and their whole life is devoted to carnage and rapine." These two sentences from Jones' "Natural History of Birds," 1872, though scientifically correct, lead the ordinary reader to conclude that the birds of this class are undesirable and should be destroyed. This, unfortunately, was the attitude of the last generation towards the hawks and the owls and other birds of prey. And in most quarters this attitude, we regret to say, has continued up to the present. Every hawk and owl has been considered a legitimate target for the rifle of the sportsman or the shotgun of the farmer. Have these birds done anything to merit such an evil name? Yes, certain members of the group certainly have. But there are hawks and hawks; injurious hawks and beneficial hawks. The man with the gun makes no distinction, and all the members of the group have been

made to suffer for the sins of the few. We shall consider in this article only those birds of the group that particularly affect the Canadian farmer. These may be conveniently considered under two headings, viz., the hawks or birds of the day, and the owls or birds of the night.

It is a most interesting study to consider how these birds are adapted by structure to the habits of their life. This study will afford us a splendid illustration of the modern method and standpoint of nature study. The student of the old school shut himself in his laboratory and dissected the dead specimen—structure was paramount with him. Now it is structure, also, but structure in relation to habit. Not the dead animal only, but also the living is studied, and that in its natural surroundings. We shall consider a few ways in which the structure of the hawk and the owl is adapted to the habits of their life.

Even the superficial observer has noticed that birds which spend most of their time in the air have relatively larger and stronger wings than those birds which spend most of their time