

OWLS.

For some reason owls have always been treated with a certain amount of ridicule and contempt. In the minds of the ignorant and superstitious they were associated with cats and witches, and were supposed to possess a certain amount of influence with the latter, whose orgies they entered into with a good deal of spirit. In mythology, however, this bird was treated respectfully. Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, selected it as her attendant, and "as wise as an owl" has passed into a proverb by reason thereof.

Most of the owls seen in the day-time appear to be stupid, clumsy and inert creatures, as they sit winking and blinking in the unaccustomed light, striving as much as possible to shade their wonderful eyes from the too-powerful rays; but see these birds at dusk and after—what a transformation takes place! They are then as alert as any hawk; their soft plumage enables them to skim noiselessly around our farm buildings and over the fields in search of their food, unlucky then is the mouse or rat that ventures to show itself, or even utter a squeak from its hiding place in the grass, (for an owl's ears are as wonderfully constructed as its eyes, and their hearing is as acute as their sight). The fate of that mouse will be sealed, and it will vex the farmer no more.

Some of the owls however, are day feeders—the Snowy Owl and the Hawk Owl I think entirely so—while the Great Horned Owl seems to be almost as active on dull days as at night; and whether the day be bright or dull these birds can always see well enough to take care of themselves and keep out of the range of a gun. In the cultivated portions of the Province of Ontario we have five species of owls that may be treated here as residents. They are not strictly so, as there is a certain migratory movement amongst them, caused probably by the failure or abundance of their food supply, which may cause them to either leave certain districts for a time or gather there in larger numbers than usual. Many instances are on record of plagues of mice having been stayed and the trouble removed by the arrival on the infested spot of large numbers of owls; these birds rapidly killed off the mice and then scattered again. Our resident species are the Great-Horned Owl, Long-eared Owl, Short-eared Owl, Barred Owl and Screech Owl.

The Great Horned Owl, or "Cat Owl," as it is often called, is the only one I have ever known to attack poultry, and it can work havoc amongst them if they are left out to roost in unprotected places. The destruction of this owl is certainly justifiable and necessary where it has taken up its quarters in a locality in which poultry is kept. It also captures great quantities of our favorite game birds, more particularly Ruffed Grouse, many a brood of which goes to satisfy the hunger of the Horned Owl's family, and are so lost to the sportsman. But as against the charge of poultry and game killing which has been proven against it, this owl has some redeeming qualities. It kills great numbers of rats, mice, squirrels and other rodents that are injurious to farmers, and strange to say it seems to be a determined enemy to the skunk. Numbers of cases have been cited in which the flesh and hair of this animal have been found in the stomachs of these owls, more particularly in the spring, and I know that fully one-half of the bodies of these birds that I have handled, were well perfumed with the odor of skunk—in many cases so much so, that I have had to throw away many fine specimens the smell being quite unbearable. Possibly these birds are fond of strong odor, for those whose feathers are not scented with skunk perfumery, have generally a strong odor of muskrat, the flesh of which they also appreciate. I have frequently known them to hunt and kill these rats in the spring, during