

The Rockwood Review.

SNOWY OWL.

(NYCTEA NYCTEA.)

This large and handsome Owl is circumpolar in its distribution, inhabiting the arctic portions of the northern hemisphere in summer and migrating south in winter. In North America it is rare west of the Rocky Mountains and south of our northern border, but in the East it is sometimes common as far south as the fortieth parallel, and as an accidental visitor nearly reaches the southern border of the United States. In Europe and Asia it extends south either regularly or accidentally to the British Isles, Holland, Belgium, Germany, southern Siberia, Turkestan, and Afghanistan.

It must not be understood that all or even any considerable portion of these Owls migrate very far south of their arctic home, for the birds which reach the United States or Southern Canada are but a small fraction of those which pass the winter near the northern line of trees. Although from some unknown cause, presumably the lack of food, there are sometimes quite extensive migrations along the eastern seaboard. For instance in the winter of 1876-77, in New England alone, Mr. Ruthven Deane knew of some 500 being seen, the majority of which were shot. (Bull Nuttall Ornith. Club, vol. 11, 1877, p. 10.)

It appears in the United States sometimes as early as October and a few occasionally remain until May. At Point de Monts on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River it has been taken as late as

May 31, though the specimen was probably a pensioner. During migration flights of these Owls are observed sometimes far out at sea.

In the far north, lemmings and arvicoline mice furnish almost the exclusive food of this Owl in summer, but during the winter wanderings, when these mamma's are not always obtainable, it takes what food it can get, such as fish, hares, muskrats, squirrels, rats, ptarmigans, ducks, or even offal.

From the following quotations it will be seen how universally this Owl depends on the lemmings for food;

Lieut. (now Gen.) A. W. Greely says: "Our observations agree with that officer (Maj. Feilden) to the effect that the food of this bird seems to consist entirely of the lemming." (Three years of Arctic Service, vol. 11, 1886, p. 381.)

Mr. Henry Seebohm says: "The lemming forms the Snowy Owl's chief food in the Far North, the range of both mammal and bird being generally the same; but other small rodents are taken, and it will sometimes attack Ptarmigan and Willow Grouse, or even the Arctic hare. It is said occasionally to feed on fish." (Hist. British Birds, vol. 1, 1883, p. 181.)

Mr. John Murdoch says: "Its abundance in the spring and summer near the coast appears to depend on the presence or absence of its favorite food, the lemming, as has been noted elsewhere by Mr. Nelson. During the season of 1882 we saw no lemmings, though signs of their presence in the