The Case of the Owl

THE HORNED OWL IS A TERROR TO BARN YARD FLOCKS

PRESIDENT HARDING "JUDGE" AND THE YOUNG "JURY"

"PRISONER TO THE BAR" THE JURY IS NOW IN SESSION

NATURE'S BEST LITTLE MOUSE TRAP

CAMOUFLAGE! THE OWL HAS IT DOWN TO PERFECTION

President Has a Visit from the John Burroughs Club and Asks Them a Question That "Stumps" the Youngsters Who Are To Report Their "Finding".

BY THOMAS E. RUSSELL

WITH the President of the United States as the "Judge" and the John Burroughs Club, of the Force School in Washington, as the "jury," the case of the owls and their value to man is being tried.

It all happened this way. To mark the end of Forest Protection Week, the John Burroughs Club decided to call upon President Harding and tell him how they were going to keep right on preaching forest protection and wild life protection 52 weeks in the year. Harold Roach the president of the club presented the President with the book "Birds in Washington," and then told him how the birds devoured the insects that in turn would destroy the forests and the crops if not checked.

Right there the President asked the club a "stumper." He wanted to know what they would do with birds that lived on other birds. Two owls have been seen in the White House grounds and as the children wanted to try and find them the President decided to ask them if in their opinion the owls should be killed. He then appointed the delegation from the club a "jury" to reach a conclusion and report back to him.

Nine Species In North America

There are only nine species of the 300 found in North America, but some of them are found everywhere. The Great Horned Owl of North America is divided into eight classes and the screech owls into nine by the scientific men who spend their life studying such things. They agree that an owl can see just as well in the day time as at night and thus much nursery rhyme and ancient lore is ruthlessly destroyed.

The loss due to prairie dogs, ground squirrels, pocket gophers, jack rabbits, meadow mice and pine mice amounts to over 150 millions dollars every year. House rats and house mice form another loss of over 200 million, not including the loss by human disease transmitted by these pests. In these days when the maintenance and increase of the food supply is so important, the value of owls is of the utmost importance.

A Great Variety Of Sizes

Owls vary from the elf owl in the Southwest, about six inches long, to the great gray owl of Northern Canada that measures 27 inches in length and fully five feet from tip to tip. The colors are browns and grays though some species are distinctly yellowish, other reddish brown, and the snowy owl of the Far North, largely white. They are similar in habit. They lose during the day in hollow trees or against the trunk, and the more they resemble the bark or dead wood, the less likely are they to be disturbed. The woodland owls are mottled, streaked and barred with various shades of gray and brown. The heads of a number of species are adorned with tufts of feathers called horns or ears, which give them a jagged contour and render the protective coloration the more effective. The short-eared owls that live in the marshes are yellow and more striped like the dead vegetation, the burrowing owls are more sandy, like the soil, and the snowy owls, belonging to the frozen North, are much whiter than the average.

With sharp talons and strongly hooked bills owls are similar to hawks. Because of their resemblance a close relationship was thought to exist, but ornithologists now believe the similarity has been brought about by like feeding habits and that they are in reality, widely separated groups, the owls being more closely related to the night-hawks and whip-poor-wills. One difference between the hawks and the owls, is the owls have their eyes set immovably in their sockets and at the front of the skull, so that both are directed forward. For this reason, an owl has to turn its head in the direction in which it wishes to look. Owl's eyes are unusually large so as to admit as much light as possible during their nocturnal activities.

Can See In Daylight

Owls can see very well in the day, for the iris can be drawn very close until scarcely more light enters than would with the normal aperture at dusk. The belief probably originated in the tameness or stupidity of some species which permit themselves to be captured during the day. The hawk owl and snowy owl hunt by day and the short-eared and great horned hunt on dark days when they have young to feed. Then too the owl is not dependent upon his eyes solely for hunting or escaping enemies, for his hearing is acute. The stiff radiating feathers about the eyes, that give owls their strange human expression have the function of protecting the opening of the ear. The tufts of feathers, often called "ears," that adorn the heads of many species have nothing to do with true ears. With the owls, however, there is a true external ear in the form of a fold of skin and an underlying groove which extends above the eye, around the side of the facial disk to below the bill. The facial disk protects the front edge of the ear and several rows of somewhat curled feathers the rear edge.

Soft Feathers

Feathers of owls, even those of the wings, are extremely soft, so that they make very little noise in flying. The Indian name for the owls, "hush wing" refers to this. This permits them to fly through the woods or low over the meadows without frightening the small rodents upon which they feed. Since most small animals are nocturnal and most birds diurnal, the chief food of the owls is small mammals and birds suffer relatively little. They are therefore, among the most beneficial birds that we have, for it is absolutely necessary that some check be placed upon small rodents.

Movements of some owls make them the more efficient protectors of our crops for they move from place to place, seeking abundant food. Particularly is this true of the short-eared owl for every time that meadow mice become unusually abundant in a locality a flight of these owls usually follows. They remain in the infested area, nesting if need be, until the rodents once again become scarce, when they move on to another region.

Great Horned Owl

Prejudice against owls is due largely to superstition and to the destruction that is occasionally wrought about the poultry yard by the great horned species. This bird can carry off full grown fowls. It sometimes kills for the mere joy of killing, destroying many fowls during a single night. On poultry and game farms, it is a bird to be feared and persistently trapped, but in the woods, where rabbits and mice and weasels are plentiful, it is far more beneficial than destructive.

The barred owl is often confused with the great horned owl under the term of "hoot owl." It is nearly as large as the great horned but it does not have the "horns" on the head and has none of the yellowish brown in its plumage characteristic of the great horned. The calls of both birds are hoots that can be heard for a half a mile or more. The snowy owl is somewhat larger than either of these owls and it is uniformly white, lightly barred with brown.

In ear tufts the long-eared owl resembles the great horned, but it is much smaller and more slender and does not have the white throat patch. It is usually found in evergreen thickets during the day and except during the nesting season, all the owls of the vicinity may resort to one such thicket to roost. The screech owl, the most common is not much larger than a robin but much heavier. It is found in the heart of large cities, in hollows of trees or in crevices about buildings, for the mice upon which it feeds are everywhere.

Small Species

Smallest of owls are the pygmy and elf owls of the Southwest. The former is a diurnal bird flying around even in the bright sun in its pursuit of insects. It measures six and a half to seven and a half inches in length and is about an inch longer than the tiny elf owl. The latter spends its days in woodpecker holes, particularly those in the giant cactus, and like other owls, comes out at night to feed. The saw-whet or Acadian owl is the smallest of the owls found in Eastern United States, being only eight inches long. It is usually found during the day in evergreen thickets, thorn bushes, or other thick places, and frequently is so tame or sleeps so soundly as to allow itself to be taken in the hand. In the Plains regions of Western United States and in Southern Florida, occurs the burrowing owl, a strange little round headed bird with legs longer than most owls because of its terrestrial habits. The Western form lives on the prairie dog towns but the Florida owl digs its own burrow.

Then we have the family known as the bark owl with about 20 species. They are much alike in color and habits, but not in size. They differ from the other owls in having long slender legs, and nearly white underparts speckled with black. The back is a very light mixture of tan and gray.

There is but one species of barn owl found in North America, occurring from the Atlantic to the Pacific, occasionally as far North as New York and New England. It lives about deserted buildings, towers, and cupolas and is one of the best mouse traps known to man.

Most owls lay their eggs in cavities in trees without any pretense at a nest, but sometimes, when there are not available, they utilize old nests of crows, hawks or even squirrels. The short-eared and snowy owls regularly lay their eggs in crude nests on the ground, and the barn owl in buildings. All lay pure white, almost spherical eggs. The majority sit very closely and if in holes may allow themselves to be captured. Some, however, like the great horned, are usually very wary and many even desert the nest if molested.

AMONG THE MOVIE STARS

KATHERINE MAC DONALD

FRANK MAYO AND LILLIAN RICH IN "THE BLAZING TRAIL"

A GROUP OF MACK SENNETT'S BATHING GIRLS

RALPH INCE

PAT O'MALLEY TEACHING MARJORIE DAW THE IRISH JIG

EDNA WHEATON

PHILIPPE DE LACEY

"Her Social Value"—A Tale of the Blue Ridge Mountains—"Wet Gold"—A Prize Winner—A Little Chap from War Ridden France.

IN her latest film, "Her Social Value," Katherine MacDonald takes the part of a shop girl, Marion Hoyt.

When Marion went home to the modest flat, where she lived with her sister Bertha, and Bertha's husband Joe, she seemed happier than usual. It had been a hard day at the glove counter of the department store, but she had met James Lodge, a young architect.

At dinner when Marion spoke of the meeting with Lodge all were emphatic in their warnings that a man of Lodge's position does not play with shop girls for any good motive. Lodge was also told by his friends that it would be better to drop the girl. Neither heeded the warnings and they were married. They soon learned however that Lodge was losing out in both a business and social way.

In desperation Marion appealed to Trent, a fast friend and business rival of Lodge. Acting on his suggestion to kill Lodge's love for her a fake elopement was planned between Marion and Trent, Marion leaving a note explaining to Lodge that she loved another man and hoping he would forgive her. They were surprised at the letter by Lodge, who received the note, sent Trent away and the next day disappeared himself, wiring Marion that she could have her freedom and that it would be useless to look for him. So both, in trying to help the other, had failed.

Months afterward, news was had of Lodge in the West. Marion, having news of great value regarding work Lodge had done previous to his disappearance, goes to him, but upon arriving at the mining camp hears that Lodge is in love with Bell.

While waiting for a train a section gang rushes into the station with the news that a land slide has buried Lodge in his cabin and medical aid must be had at once. Marion returns with the doctor, finds Lodge badly shaken up and nurses him. Explanations result in a clearing up of all difficulties and much joy.

"The Blazing Trail"

The story of a young physician whose nerves are shattered in his search for a potent serum and who is sent to the Blue Ridge Mountains to regain his health. As a plain woodsman he is accepted by the primitive community and is drawn into a chain of thrilling events which not only brings back his mental poise but awakens his scientific instinct and his physical prowess, incidentally Mother Nature and Dan Cupid bring him health and happiness.

Pat And Majorie

Wurra, wurra! Marjorie Daw will soon learn the Irish jig if Pat O'Malley has his way. Pat is putting Marjorie through the steps between scenes at the studio every day. Pat seems pleased with his position as instructor. Who wouldn't.

Ralph Ince

Three in one — actor, director, athlete—that is Ralph Ince who directed "Wet Gold," one of the most unusual photoplays ever filmed. Many of the scenes were taken at the bottom of the sea.

Mr. Ince, who not only directed "Wet Gold," but also played the leading part in the story, has been acting for the screen since the days of its early popularity. Besides acting and directing, Mr. Ince has found that his athletic prowess is often called upon to make a photoplay realistic. In "Wet Gold," he is seen diving from a vessel into the water, swimming to the bottom of the sea and coming up through an air chamber in a submarine lying below. It is a remarkable athletic feat that has tremendous dramatic interest.

"Mr. Williamson's discovery of the possibilities of under-water photography," said Mr. Ince, "opens up an entirely new field for the motion picture. Not only the wonders of land, but the marvels of the sea may now serve as subjects for the photoplay. And the element of novelty, of man struggling with the undercurrents of the ocean and the inhabitants of the sea, will open new fields for the photoplaywright and the under water photographer."

Edna Wheaton

When Edna Wheaton went to New York it was her ambition to become a successful choir soloist. Today, because she was judged the most beautiful girl of the 6,000 who submitted their photographs in a contest she promises to become a leading screen favorite.

Already Miss Wheaton has played the role of "Beauty" in the allegorical play "Experience," one of the prizes of the contest. She will also appear with Elsie Ferguson in "Footlights," from Rita Weiman's Saturday Evening Post Story.

Philippe de Lacey

At three and a half years, Philippe de Lacey is a veteran of the greatest war in history and an established movie actor. He was born in France, at Nancy, during a German air raid that filled the air with bursting shells. Miss Edith de Lacey, an American nurse, found him beside his dead mother, cared for him, adopted him, brought him to this country, and without difficulty, found him "work" in pictures. Little Philippe furnishes a special charm in "Without Benefit of Clergy," Rudyard Kipling's first motion picture feature.