



ABOUT OWLS

Waiting for Nightfall and a Meal of Mice.

Prepared by National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.—WNU Service.

THE evening air of early spring in the Everglades of southern Florida is soft and mild. Delicate scents from blossoms come with the breeze, together with the voices of myriad frogs in incessant but attractive chorus from the marshes. Suddenly, from the moss-festooned live oaks in this peaceful background, comes an outburst of demoniacal laughter, guttural in sound and startling in its abruptness.

Playing the beam of light from an electric torch through the branches, you discover presently two glowing spots of ruby red, reflections from a pair of eyes. As your own eyes adjust themselves to the feeble illumination, you can distinguish dimly the shadowy form of a great barred owl. The hubbub stops immediately, for the bird is puzzled by the spot of light; but as you continue along the trail the owl, now behind you, utters a loud, prolonged whoo-oo-oo-aw that resounds eerily among the trees. Until daybreak you hear at intervals the wild ululation of its calls filling the darkened woodland.

The voices of owls are more familiar than their persons, as most of them are active principally at night, and without special search the birds themselves are difficult to see. Their presence, unseen but constantly evident, has caused imagination to play about them until in practically every country in the world there have grown up fables and superstitions regarding owls.

The little owl of Europe, about as large as the American screech owl without the ear tufts of that species, has long been an emblem of wisdom, and in early years was accepted as a special ward of Pallas Athene of the Greeks. Romans, to whom this goddess became Minerva, did not retain this reverence for the bird, considering it of evil omen and a messenger of bad news. Death was foretold by owls alighting on the housetops, and their calls nearby at night aroused fear and foreboding.

He Only Looks Wise.

The vogue of the owl as an emblem of wisdom is not due to any special intelligence of the bird, but to the conformation of the head, with two eyes so placed that they look directly ahead like those of man.

As the companion of night-flying witches, or as one of the ingredients in the brews concocted by these trouble-makers, the owl developed a black and unsavory reputation, attested by many references to its evil omen in Shakespeare and other writers.

Among American Indians, owls, though feared at times, were in better repute and were the basis of various lively legends. Zuni tales include stories of one called "gray owl" that lived in a house as a man does. The Pima Indians held that at death the human spirit passed into the body of an owl and, to assist in this transmigration, they gave owl feathers, kept for the purpose in a special box, to a dying person.

Among the Plains Indians, the Arikara included an owl group as one of their eight mystic societies, and in the sacred rites of this body they used the stuffed skin of an owl with disks of cunningly fitted buffalo horn for eyes. This emblem was displayed during their ceremonies to represent night, the eyes being symbolic of the morning star.

Owls are found throughout the world from the Arctic regions through the continents and to remote islands in the sea. More than 300 kinds are known, ranging in size from the tiny elf owls, no larger than sparrows, to the powerful horned owls and eagle owls, which are two feet or more in length.

Scientifically, all owls are included in one order, the Strigiformes, in which two families are recognized, one for the barn owls (Tytonidae) and the other (Strigidae) for all other species.

Regardless of their size, owls are instantly identified by their broad faces with prominent disks of feathers about the eyes, coupled with sharp, curved beaks and claws, and long, fluffy feathers. Their nearest relatives are the whippoorwills, nighthawks, and goat-suckers.

Formerly it was thought that owls were allied to hawks and falcons, but on careful study it was found that these two groups differ radically in structure. The resemblances are superficial and are due to the form of the beak and claws, which have undergone similar development from seeking the same kinds of foods.

Other Birds Dislike Them.

Most owls are nocturnal and by day sleep in caves, hollow trees, tangles of leaves, or whatever may offer protection. When they are found by other birds there is high excitement, jays, cardinals, and the like gathering to scold and chatter at these enemies of the night. Crows are more aggressive and often drive the largest owls to seek more secure cover where they may avoid their cawing black tormentors.

The homes of owls are located in hollows of trees, caverns in rocks, or in stick nests built by hawks, crows, or other birds. Often no nesting material of any kind is used. The eggs are white, occasionally tinted with buff or pale blue, but without markings, and are peculiar in being usually elliptical or nearly round. The young are covered with white down and remain in the nest under care of the parents for a considerable time.

In defense of their young, owls are often aggressive and swoop at any and all who chance to pass, sometimes with startling effect when the attack is delivered without warning. A scientist climbing to the nest of a great horned owl once was struck so savagely in the back by one of the parents that the strong talons of the bird drew blood through the heavy clothing he wore.

Their Plumage Is Soft.

All owls have soft plumage composed of long, fluffy feathers. The wings have softened margins, so

that in flight the birds move without sound, as if they were shadows. In owls, the lower leg, or tarsus, and upper surfaces of the toes, bare in most birds, are covered with feathers, these being reduced or absent only in a few species that inhabit warm countries. The plumage colors run usually to gray, brown and buff, with lighter markings of buff and gray. White and black are extensive in some, but brighter colors are rare or absent.

Some of the smaller owls have round markings on the back of the head, resembling eyes. In South America the country people tell you these birds have four eyes. They can see behind as well as ahead.

The eyes of the owl are fixed so immovably in the head, where both are directed forward, that the bird must change the position of the head to alter its line of vision. They are especially large and are adapted for vision where there is little light. A boy was once told that an owl, sitting on a perch, would follow with its eye a person moving around and around it, until eventually its head would twist off.

Opportunity arose to test out this intriguing theory on a Florida screech owl perched in a low pine. The boy walked around the owl for some time with its eyes steadily on him. As its head did not fall off the boy was completely mystified, but later, at a somewhat mature age, in other experiments of this kind, he detected the quick movement by which the owl snaps its head around rapidly, giving the semblance of continuous motion in one direction.

Though the majority of owls remain hidden in shaded, secluded places by day, there are a few that are abroad by day or by night indifferently. This is true of the snow owl, which lives in summer through the long Arctic day, and of the burrowing owls of open country in the new world. The latter delights in resting in the sun, and in broad daytime detects and watches hawks and other birds flying at such great heights that one can barely see them.

What They Eat.

Owls live mostly on animal food which is captured alive, except that occasionally they feed upon rabbits freshly killed by automobiles along our highways, or upon other carcasses. Mice, rats, and other small mammals are regular prey, as are birds of various species.

The barred owl eats many crayfish and fish, while crabs and fish are staple foods of the fish owls of Africa and India, which have featherless legs and rough, horny-surfaced toes to assist in capturing such slippery prey. Horned owls have been known to capture goldfish in ornamental pools, but this is unusual.

Owls, like hawks, tear their prey apart and swallow the pieces entire. During digestion the flesh is assimilated, while bones, fur, feathers, and other indigestible portions are formed into compact pellets, which are regurgitated to leave the stomach empty for another meal. Such pellets accumulate about roosts and, through identification of the bones contained, give a valuable index to the food of the bird concerned.

The great horned owls and snowy owls are fiercely predatory, killing rabbits, squirrels, and other creatures of good size. The former has been known to capture and eat small owls. In the Dominican Republic was seen a burrowing owl tearing at the body of a young bird of its own kind which had been killed and thrown aside by some natives.

Occasionally wild mice increase for various reasons until they form a veritable plague. Under such circumstances short-eared owls gather in abundance and aid in reducing the numbers of the pests. Burrowing owls feed extensively on beetles and other large insects, and the barn owl in California destroys many Jerusalem crickets.

Through A WOMAN'S EYES

by JEAN NEWTON

LAUGHTER IS NOT ENOUGH

A HUNTER college English professor says that our greatest need today is for a satirist to laugh away contemporary troubles.

"What the times need," we are told, "is an Addison or a Moliere before whose keen and ironic mockery, our futile follies will melt away like mist before a freshening wind."

The professor mentions two authors who are indeed famed for illuminating with the cold light of satire the weakness and follies of their time and country.

But he does not say that the satirists cured those faults of their time, or that the faults "melted

away like mist" as he hoped today's follies would if held up to sufficient laughter.

There can be no doubt that a sense of humor is a saving grace any time, and that above all, to be able to laugh at ourselves is the most promising sign. Laughter even the laughter of mockery, always help to put things in their place, to strengthen our sense of value.

In other words, laughter helps to bear follies and faults.

But for the more constructive action of overcoming them, we need more. We need the understanding that is sometimes closer to tears than laughter. We need patience and—love.

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BEDTIME STORY

By THORNTON W. BURGESS

LIGHTFOOT DISCOVERS LOVE

WONDERFULLY handsome was Lightfoot the Deer as he stood in the little opening by the pond of Paddy the Beaver, his head thrown back proudly as he received the congratulations of his neighbors of the Green Forest who had seen him win the great fight with the big stranger who had come down from the Great Mountain. To beautiful Miss Daintyfoot, peeping out from a thicket where she had hidden to



He Wondered If She Would Disappear and Run Away.

watch the great fight, Lightfoot was the most wonderful person in all the Great World. She adored him, which means that she loved him just as much as it was possible for her to love.

But Lightfoot didn't know this. In fact he didn't know that Miss Daintyfoot was there. His one thought had been to drive out of the Green Forest the big stranger who had come down from the Great Mountain. He had been jealous of that big stranger, though he hadn't known that he was jealous. The real cause of his anger and desire to fight had been fear that the big stranger would find Miss Daintyfoot and take her away. Of course this was nothing but jealousy.

Now that the great fight was over and he knew that the big stranger was hurrying back to the Great Mountain, all Lightfoot's anger melted away. In its place was a great longing, a longing to find Miss Daintyfoot. His great eyes became once more soft and beautiful. In them was a look of wistfulness. Lightfoot walked down to the edge of the water and drank, for he was very, very thirsty. Then he turned, intending to once more take up his search for beautiful Miss Daintyfoot.

When he turned he faced the thicket in which Miss Daintyfoot was hiding. His keen eyes caught

a little movement of the branches. A beautiful head was slowly thrust out and Lightfoot gazed into a pair of soft eyes which he was sure were the most beautiful eyes in all the Great World.

He wondered if she would disappear and run away as she had the last time he saw her. He took a step or two forward. The beautiful head was withdrawn. Lightfoot's heart sank; then he bounded forward into the thicket. He more than half expected to find no one there, but when he entered the thicket he received the most wonderful surprise in all his life.

There stood Miss Daintyfoot, timid, bashful, but with a look in her eyes which Lightfoot could not mistake. In that instant Lightfoot understood the meaning of that longing which had kept him hunting for her, and of the rage which had filled him when he had discovered the presence of the big stranger from the Great Mountain. It was love. Lightfoot knew that he loved Miss Daintyfoot, and looking into her soft gentle eyes, he knew that Miss Daintyfoot loved him.

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My Neighbor

▼ ▼ Says: ▼ ▼

Always use a metal instead of a wooden spoon when cutting and folding eggs into a cake.

To clean reed furniture take it out of doors when the sun is warm, turn the garden hose on it and let it dry thoroughly before taking it into the house. This removes all dust.

To propagate daphne lay the trailing branches in the spring, making an incision in the under part of stem. Plant cut part two inches under loam and keep moist. Cutting may be separated next spring.

The sirup left over from a can of peaches or a glass of preserved strawberries heated and added to a package of gelatin instead of the hot water one usually adds to dissolve gelatin changes a rather monotonous dessert into a delicious one.

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Hereditary

"I'm sorry, but I can do nothing for you as your complaint is hereditary. My fee is \$10."
"Good! Send the bill to my ancestors."