

The Screech Owl, Man's Friend.

There is a bird fight going on down in the old apple tree. All the robins about the place are there dashing about and yelling their heads off. The robins are always starting something. There goes the querulous towhee just following the crowd, and a junco curious to see what it is all about. Yes, you have guessed right. An inoffensive screech owl has been walking in his sleep and blundered up into the old orchard. Every bill is against him, even that double-crosser, the Stellar jay, who makes the air ring with:

"Traitor! Traitor!"

blasphemy

The ~~bird~~ goes on while the hunched-up grayish ~~form~~ ^{victim} ~~huddles~~ ^{culprit sits like a sphinx} on a limb and looks stupid with ~~round, unseeing~~ ^{staring} ~~eyes~~ yellow eyes, or breaks the spell with a forlorn ~~wink~~ one-sided wink.

For years a family of screech owls have been raised in a big hole in a crippled old cottonwood on ~~the~~ ^{our} river bank. This is perhaps ninety or a hundred feet below the house for the hillside descends in steep terraces and is well wooded. Each year we look for the coming-out of the owl children. on a moonlight night, Looking down the hill from the wide terrace, you catch the movement of a shadow that drops into a dark fir tree and becomes a faintly outlined lump on a limb. ^{we} You strain your eyes to make out where the lump moves, or whether it was just ^{our} imagination on your part. Then softly, tremulously comes ^{that mellow} unmistakable "whinneying" ~~and~~ of the screech owl, ~~and~~ ^{that} a real shadow drops down beside the little dark lump on the limb. It comes to life and ^{Something says silently in it how where we are} ~~and~~ though soundless, there are evident movements of the two shadows bobbing on the fir branch. The mother screech owl is feeding her brood, ^{as they} ~~she hunts for them~~ perching patiently here and there in the dark trees. Calls and answers and flaring shadows bring the hillside to life, moonbeams slanting through the trees, dimly lighting the placid river far below.

It is a pleasant place for an owl estate and with squatters' rights, the screech owls have ^{possessed} ~~owned~~ it for a good many years. I can't remember when the owl family ~~have~~ ^{has} failed us, for the children come along regularly to keep us company of summer evenings. When old enough to pilot themselves through the woods and over the lawns that are literally perforated with mouse holes, the young owls are a chummy bunch. They float out over the mouse hunting ground, hover on

light?

silent wings, then back again to a perch in one of the maple trees right over
our heads. As you look at each other- and perhaps talk softly to get ac-

quainted- it is a misty, dim picture for you, ^{us} ~~for~~ for those luminous yellow owl ^{us} ~~your~~ face at The youngsters ^{us} ~~bird~~ eyes ~~it~~ is as clear as noonday. ~~They~~ are used to you and come and go

in their breakfast hunting. They are alive to life and ^{on their own} ~~getting a living~~ now, ~~and~~ are seldom still. They move about on a limb, hop up to a higher one, ~~and~~ ^{and} with a sudden sharp call drop to pick up a scurrying mouse.

In the fall when housekeeping and baby-raising are over, and the whole family are busy building up fat and feathers, there is an electric essence in the air. The cold moonlight glitters on the leaves and frosts the tips of the grass. ~~It makes lacework of many silver spider webs that waver in the air.~~ It picks up a spider web spread on a bush and makes a silver lacework of it. The owls are electrified, too, *and more talkative,* and quicken their pace as *directness* they cut through the air with an uncanny *certainty?* silence.

In mid November,

I leaned out of ~~an open~~ ^{the} window at midnight. Suddenly from the eaves above my head a sharp "Kyeek"² sounded. It startled me at first, then I knew him. Through the roof and shingles I felt the eager expectancy in the call. He was answered from the hillside below, and then another, until it seemed as if all the family of owls were talking to each other at once. in short, staccato tones. Whether this was a thrill from the crisp night and adventure-which wouldn't be unbelievable ~~for others~~ ^{even for} ~~than~~ owls- I didn't want to determine. I hoped so. The owls out-last ed me and I went to bed still hearing those clear, singing calls.

One notable thing ~~to be mentioned~~ about this owl is that apparently the birds are mated for life, or at least they inhabit the same old home tree

for a number of years. As far as known, there has been but one pair nesting
each year. No one thing

on our place and in the same cottonwood on the river bank. ^{no one thinks of} They have never ^{of} molesting them except to pay a short visit & peck in at their door. ^{of} been molested on the place. This summer a couple of curious little boys found one of the ^{of} children a half grown screech-owls sleeping in a willow tree on the ^{bank!} river. The little thin and straight

real feat, the boys picked him off his perch and brought him up to the house.

After taking a good look and learning something about this owl, the boys were admonished to return ~~the little owl~~ him to the exact perch where they found him.

Perhaps the strangest thing about ~~this owl~~ the screech owl is what is called "dichromatism," which means the development of two plumage phases, a gray and a red. Long ago William Dutcher said, "a bird of one color may be mated with a bird of another color, and all of their young may be of one color, either red or gray; or the parents may be of one color and the young of mixed colors. Hence this bird is often called the "mottled owl."

The little screech owl is well known throughout the United States. Scattered over the country are eight kinds typical of the various regions, the Florida screech owl, the Rocky Mt. screech owl, MacFarlane's screech owl, Kennicott's screech owl, Aiken's screech owl, the Mexican or Arizona screech owl, the spotted screech owl, and the flammulated screech owl. The last one is the least seen and known perhaps, and has one distinct peculiarity. The iris of the eyes of all the other owls is yellow, while that of the flammulated owl is a dark chocolate-brown, giving to the bird a queer mild expression almost un-owl like. The Kennicott's screech owl is the one found commonly in Oregon, ranging from this state to Sitka, Alaska.

With the exception of the burrowing owl, the screech owl feeds more extensively on insects than any of the others ~~of the~~ owls. It is a diligent mouser, but also will gather in ~~mice~~, beetles, frogs, scorpions, crickets, grasshoppers, cutworms, and even occasionally small fish. ^{He also has} There are some rare records of chipmunks, wood rats, flying squirrels, and moles. As nearly three-fourths ^{his} of ~~this owl's~~ food consists of injurious mammals and insects, ^{he} there is little question that ~~it~~ should be carefully protected.

A few years ago a farmer in the Milwaukee region planted about an acre of young peach trees. In the fall he had ^{carefully} piled ~~some~~ mowed grass around the base of each tree as a protection during the winter. Previous experience had not taught him that he had furnished a winter food supply for mice. In the spring he found every tree girdled under the grass and his peach orchard was dead. He should have called in the screech owl brigade to clean out the mice.

The mice come out at night, scurrying across the fields and in and out of
This is the time they attack trees and do so much damage.
their numerous holes. The screech owl knows this well for his hunting time

is at night also. The little owl ~~has big~~ yellow eyes ~~that~~ see every movement
in the dark, ~~and hears the slightest sound~~ footstep of little rodents. He fans

noiselessly over ~~the~~ his hunting ground and detects the slightest ~~noise or~~ *footstep of a little*
~~movement.~~ His drop is sure: his clutch is death. *rodent.*