

THE SCREECH OWL.

Megascops Asio.

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Just before dark, May 31, 1886, when I was coming home from an ornithological ramble, I saw three young but full grown Screech Owls sitting in a row on a fallen limb of a tree.

As I approached they flew; but although the sun was down they seemed blinded by the light. One flew towards me and I caught him. I tied him to the fence for that night, and the next morning made a perch to which I fastened him with a very light steel chain.

I kept this owl till the morning of June 7 of the same year, when on going to feed him, I found him missing and the chain broken. I often wondered how he could have broken the chain; but the finding the chain in the yard not long ago has led me to believe that my pet was killed and carried off by some prowling cat. In the short time I kept him, he did not get at all tame, snapping his bill and hissing whenever I approached, although he ate greedily, his food consisting of raw beefsteak.

April, 25, 1888, I found a nest which at the time I could not reach. In the afternoon of the same day, a friend and I visited the nest, carrying with us a ladder and a hatchet. Of course the ladder would not reach to the nest, but we knocked off the two bottom rounds; then I went to a fence not far distant, knocked off a plank and drew the nails. With these nails we fastened the rounds to the tree, above the ladder, and by their help my friend soon reached the nest and secured the four young owls it contained. Then he came down, knocking off the ladder rounds from the tree as he did so. On reaching the ground, he put the rounds back on the ladder, while I nailed the plank back on the fence.

Then we examined our prizes. They were all perfectly white and their eyes were closed. Two of them were a little larger than a chicken in the down and the other two smaller, one of them being considerably smaller than the rest. The cere of the two largest was bluish and that of the others white.

The nest consisted of a few leaves and twigs, in a natural cavity 18

inches deep and 30 feet high, the opening on the southern side of a beech tree. Beside the owls, the nest contained two mice, one partially eaten, and the feathers of a Flicker. These owls did not live long, but while they did live they could eat more than anything I ever saw. I mean, of course, in proportion to their size.

The difference in the coloration of these birds has no reference to their age and sex. Adults and young, both male and female, are to be found in either the red or gray plumage.

In common with all the other owls with which I am familiar, the Screech Owl has not the power of moving his eyes in their sockets. They can, however, twist their heads into almost any position, so as to look at any object directly behind or over them.

They are common residents in south-western Kentucky, commencing to breed late in March. The nest consists merely of a few twigs and leaves, generally in a hole in a living tree. An old apple tree seems to be a favorite nesting site. I think it is rare to find one so far from the ground as the one I found in April, '88, mentioned above.

The eggs are from four to seven, eight or even nine in number, pure white, almost spherical and measure, according to Mr. Davie, 1.40x1.25 in.

