

banded white bill. In times past they have bred in this vicinity, and it looks as though they might breed there again this spring.

We arrived at the Heronry about 10 a. m. This particular colony is situated off the main Gay Head-Edgartown road, about one-third of the way between the road and the north-western end of Squibnocket.

A small marshy pond, oval in shape, about one hundred yards long and half as wide, bordered by a wide fringe of tall bushes and dead trees, comprises the Night Heron colony.

The birds were sitting on every bush and tree in sight — about three hundred of them, and every bird a Black-crowned Night Heron. At our approach the Herons nearest us rose in clouds and settled on the other side of the pond. They were all very wild and would not allow any sort of an approach for observation. It was necessary for us to make use of a pair of high-power glasses to see any detail at all. The birds were all in their splending breeding plumage and made a beautiful picture perched on the dead tree tops with the sun shining directly on them. We watched them for about an hour and enjoyed every minute of that hour.

We drove back through the Heath-Hen Reservation, passing a covey of about twenty or thirty Quail on the way, but it was too late in the day to see any Heath-Hen.

Joe and I took the afternoon boat and arrived back in town that night. We are planning to go down to camp again the last of May and visit the breeding grounds of the Herring and Laughing Gulls, Piping Plover, Terns, and Parula Warblers. Boston, Massachusetts.

SCREECH OWL

(*Otus asio asio*)

E. D. NAUMAN

(Observations on some of its food habits).

When my brother and I were boys our home was on a farm near where the town of Keota, Iowa, now stands. The farm buildings were located near the margin of an extended forest.

We boys became interested in the domestic pigeon business. We built and put up nest boxes to the number of about a dozen and usually had about that many pairs of adult pigeons about the place. When undisturbed they produced many a pair of

luscious squabs and besides furnishing the family a rare dish occasionally, they also produced some revenue for us.

The third summer we had the pigeons, however, something interfered with them so they did not prosper. The adult pigeons, besides being unusually wild, gradually disappeared and they produced few or no squabs. Several times we discovered dead and half devoured young pigeons in the nest boxes. Once I found the remains of an adult pigeon that had been partly devoured. We could not account for this state of affairs; but it was certain that our pigeon business was "on the blink." We tried to account for our misfortune by assuming that rats, or minks, or weasels were doing the mischief. This did not, however, quite fill the bill, for some of the nest boxes were so located that it was hard to see how any of these Carnivora could reach them.

For a long time, we were completely at sea without anchor or compass in regard to this mysterious matter. But finally the time came when all was made plain. One day I suddenly raised the lid off a nest box where there still had lived a pair of pigeons, and I was startled and dumfounded to see an Owl dodge out through the opening and make his get-away in great haste. And there was a half devoured pigeon left in the box. The owl had got out of the box in such a hurry that I could not be sure at the instant as to what species it belonged to but by subsequent observations we made certain that the mischief was being done by Screech Owls. We made war on them of course, as under the circumstances I think we were justified in doing. We shot a number of them and cut down several of the trees in the immediate vicinity, where they were known to live, and almost immediately our pigeon business began to improve and in due time to prosper again.

In recent years there was located an outhouse or storage room near a residence two blocks from my present home in Sigourney, Iowa. The one side of this outhouse was covered with a thick mat of Virginia Creeper. This tangle of vines was a favorite hiding and roosting place for great swarms of small birds, mostly English sparrows.

Directly in front of this tangle of vines and about 15 feet distant stood a clothes line post seven feet high. Many times as I passed there in the evening I could see a Screech Owl stationed on this post with his yellow eyes fixed on that tangle of

vines. One evening as I was passing, the owl made a sudden dash into the vines and flew away carrying a wriggling and screeching sparrow in its talons. The gentleman who lived at that place told me that he had seen the owls catch a great many birds at this tangle of vines. I suppose we are justified in assuming that these owls do not indulge in any hair splitting arguments over sub-species, so doubtlessly many a luckless Junco, Tree Sparrow, or other small bird is obliged to contribute to their bill of fare.

For many years a pair of these little owls have made their home in a hollow limb of one of our shade trees within 12 feet of our residence. Last summer a pair of Crested Flycatchers appropriated another hollow limb of the same tree and made their nest therein. The opening to the Flycatchers' home was only about eight feet from the owl's front doorway.

For about three weeks everything passed along amicably so far as I could see. I saw the Flycatchers every day many times and heard them oftener. They had already begun to carry food to their young when suddenly something happened. Everything was not peace and tranquility about the Flycatchers' home. I could see only one bird and he was shy and not carrying any food, and in a few days he also disappeared. The location of their nest in the tree was somewhat inaccessible, so I did not attempt to climb up and make a more careful examination. I cannot, therefore, make any positive statement in regard to this case, but it looks mighty suspicious for the owls. It seems they must have had a "swell" dinner at about this time, consisting of a brood of young Flycatchers and one adult ditto.

These are simply a few discordant notes in the grand symphony of Nature. A perfectly good little owl should of course catch nothing but mice, rats, rodents, grasshoppers, etc. But they do not. Government reports show however that not over one-sixth of this owl's food consists of other birds. The balance or five-sixths consists of mice and other rodents and insects, thus indicating that the Screech Owl is mainly a beneficial bird and should be protected, excepting possibly in a few individual cases.

Sigourney, Iowa.