

## Protection of Hawks and Owls

Recent trends toward general protection of all hawks and owls indicate an increasing awareness of the unsound practice of classifying any form of wildlife as "harmful." The States of Connecticut, Michigan, and Indiana now protect all species of hawks and owls except when doing specific damage. (Copies of a detailed survey of recent protection laws by K. D. Morrison may be obtained from the National Audubon Society, 1130 Fifth Avenue, New York 28, New York at 10c each, 3 for 25c, or 10 for 50c) These new laws are an encouraging sign of progress in public education and should stimulate us to increase our efforts to bring about similar changes locally. The following digest of an article that appeared in **The Minnesota Naturalist** (Vol. III, No. 3, March, 1953) describes one landowner's attitude toward these birds — we hope many readers will agree with his philosophy.

### A Digest of "BANDITS OF THE PINE BARRENS"

By Herman J. Brown

For fourteen years Herman J. Brown raised turkeys and chickens on a farm on the banks of the St. Croix River near Grantsburg, Wisconsin. The farm reached back into the Jack Pine Barrens, two or three hundred square miles dominated by jack pine and scrub oak, with a belt of deciduous forest covering the river lowland. The proximity of this wild area, with its full quota of hawks and owls, gave Mr. Brown an opportunity to work out the relationship between domestic poultry and the various predatory birds.

The farm buildings were grouped on the river bank, just between the pines and the deciduous trees, and the laying flock of turkeys, from December to May, was penned nearby. Young poults were kept in runs until they were six to eight weeks old. Then they were transferred to portable roosts, roofed but open on three sides, and allowed to range in the clearings that lay beyond a belt of woods, a quarter to half a mile away. The turkeys were moved

about on these ranges until late November or early December, when the unmarketed birds and breeding flock were moved once more to pens near the buildings. This routine exposed at least some of the birds to predation throughout the year.

Hawks and owls were common in the area. Brown saw and positively identified the Goshawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Marsh Hawk, Bald Eagle, Sparrow Hawk, Screech Owl, Saw-whet Owl, Short-eared Owl, Northern Barred Owl, Snowy Owl, Great Horned Owl.

Of the resident predatory birds, some species were more harmful than others to the operations of the poultry farm. Ravens were uncommon visitors and never approached the domestic birds, but crows were plentiful and during some years raided the turkeys' nests persistently. Losses from crows amounted to five or six dollars a year.

The Bald Eagle, Osprey, Marsh Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk and Broad-winged Hawk did not interfere with the poultry. As might be expected, however, the accipiters displayed a different attitude, all the members of this group showing an interest in the turkeys and chickens. Perhaps because it was present in fewer numbers, the Sharp-shinned Hawk never actually took a bird, although it was seen hovering over the screen porches on which the young turks were running. The Cooper's Hawk, which appeared in the neighborhood two or three times a week during the spring and summer, was caught killing turkeys only twice during the fourteen years. On both occasions the individual hawk returned once or twice to kill another bird and was shot. No chickens were taken, and the loss for the fourteen years totalled five, seven or eight-week-old turkeys, valued at about ten dollars.

The Goshawk, which occurred in the area only in the winter when the turkeys were well grown, was known to upset the flock by swooping upon them, but never attacked. It did, however, take chickens if they were not penned early in the

fall. During the six years that Brown kept a henhouse, a dozen adult chickens were taken before he could kill the hawks, a total known loss of about twenty-five dollars.

The losses from six species of hawks, and from the Bald Eagle, Crow and Raven, over a period of fourteen years, can be summed up as follows:

From the Crow's egg stealing	\$60.00
From the Cooper's Hawk .....	10.00
From the Goshawk .....	25.00
TOTAL .....	\$95.00

The conservationist might well compare this figure with losses from animals over which these birds exercise some control. Mice in the granary did about twenty dollars damage a year, squirrels carried off bushels of corn, pocket gophers plagued the hay meadows. Losses from these sources must have added up to three or four times the amount charged to the hawks. To be fair, one should add that had the young chickens and turkeys been exposed, losses would have been greater. Also, a certain loss might have occurred unnoticed.

Of the owls, the smaller species, the Short-eared, Screech and Saw-whet, caused no trouble. The Snowy Owl was rare in the area, and was also never suspected of molesting the poultry. On the other hand, the Barred Owl, quite abundant, took young poults that had been moved

into open shelters from the brooder house prematurely. Once old enough to be moved to their customary ranges, young turks were not attacked. Total number of poults taken by these owls was estimated at fifteen, all young, so that the financial loss was not over thirty dollars.

The real villain of the piece was the Great Horned Owl. The Horned Owl turned at once from his native prey to the turkeys. Attacks were made at night, and the owl killed even grown birds (weighing from twelve to seventeen pounds, compared to the owl's three or four). Brown was unable to estimate the damage suffered by the flocks from the Horned Owl because the loss from continual harassing was much more serious than the loss from actual fatalities, although these were numerous enough. The nervous reaction of the turkeys to the Horned Owl's attacks resulted in lost weight and finish in the dressed birds.

In spite of his own experience, Brown does not name the Horned Owl as everybody's enemy. His poultry were raised in a remote area where the owl was native, and many farms are much less exposed. The aim of his whole article is to persuade poultry growers not to act against the predatory birds without cause. He does this by calculating in as fair a manner as possible the exact capacity of these birds for harm.

## Alberta Controversy Re: Protection of Birds of Prey

In Saskatchewan, the following birds of prey are not protected by provincial law: Snowy Owl, Great Horned Owl, Goshawk, Pigeon Hawk, Duck Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk. In Alberta, on the other hand, all hawks and owls are protected. However, two resolutions have come recently from the Calgary Fish and Game Association asking for a modification of this blanket protection. These resolutions read as follows:

1. "Whereas the Horned Owl is a voracious, wide-ranging hunter and whereas they are proved to be detrimental to our game bird population and whereas they are

now protected and whereas they have no natural enemies and no natural control except food conditions and whereas it is extremely unlikely that they will ever become extinct due to hunting, therefore be it resolved that Horned Owls be placed on the predator list."

2. "Whereas the Marsh Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Snowy Owl, Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk, Duck Hawk and Pigeon Hawk are harmful to our game bird population and whereas they are now on the protected list, therefore be it resolved that these hawks be placed on the predator list."