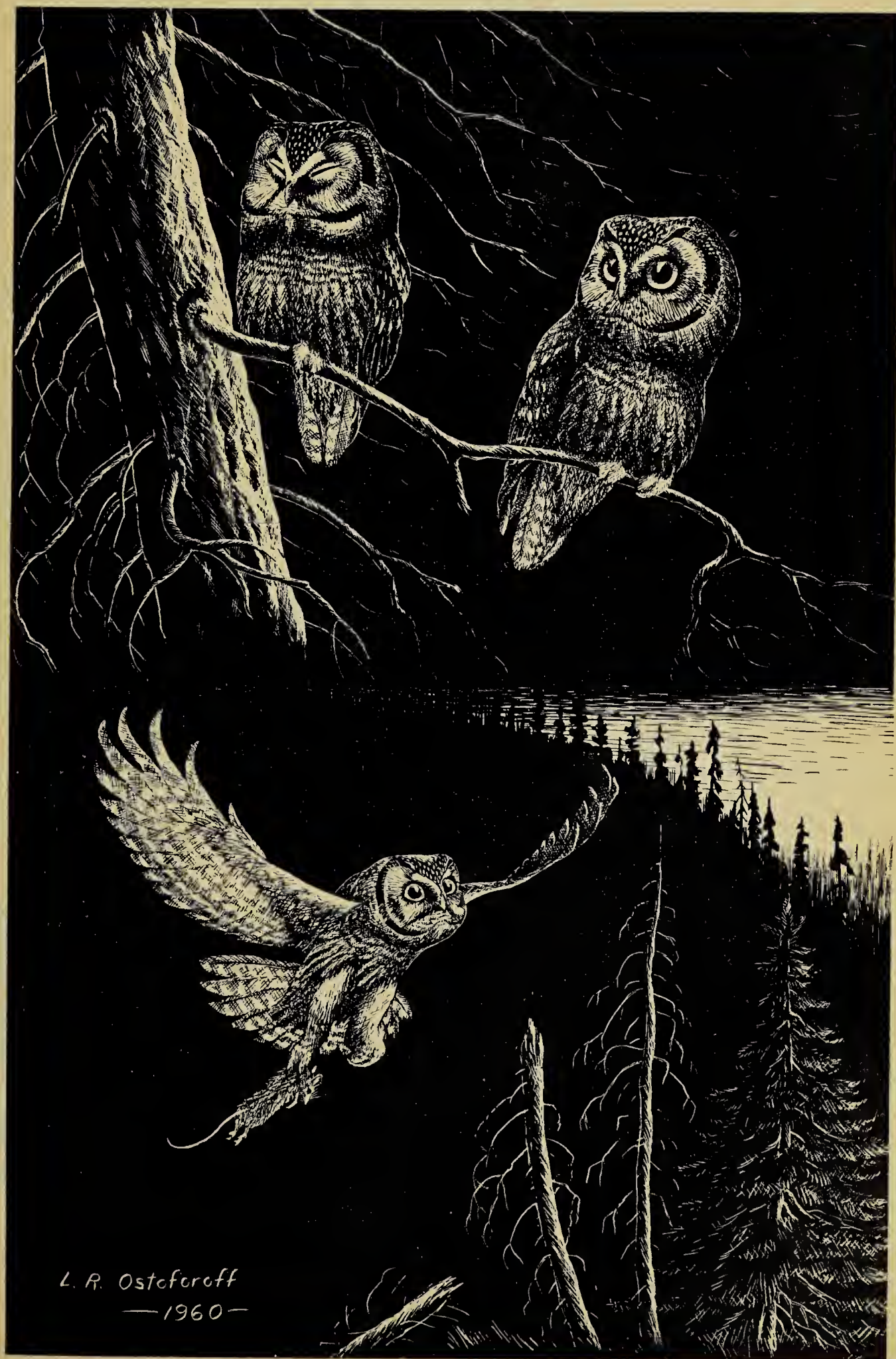


Impressions of a Boreal Owl

by Lawrence R. Ostoforoff, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



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—1960—



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The Boreal Owl is slightly larger than a Saw-whet Owl and somewhat like a Barred Owl in general appearance. Its fast-moving, broad and rounded wings produce a soft, whirring sound which, together with swift and exceptionally maneuverable flight, suggest the flight behaviour of certain large moths. This maneuverability in flight is perhaps an adaptation to its life in the thick evergreen forests of the north

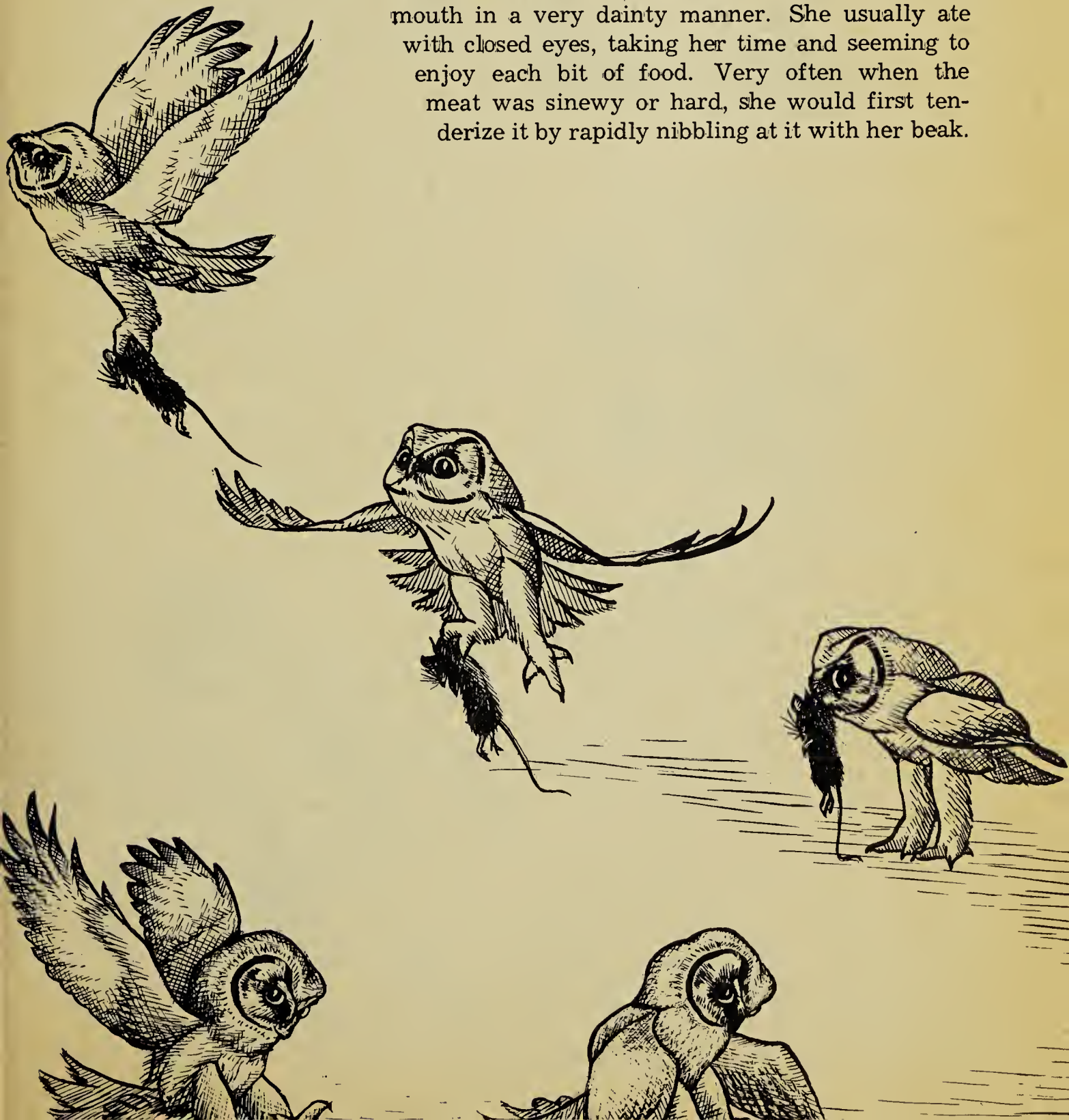
A female Boreal Owl which was found alive in Regina in January was kept in captivity in the zoological lab of the Museum for two months. During this period this tiny elfin owl captivated most of the Museum staff as well as many others who came to see her. This owl became very tame and soon learned to fly down to my hand for bits of meat, and to catch the live white mice released for it nearly daily. She would dive down from her customary perch on the ceiling lamps directly onto the mouse, even when we were standing nearby. In the sketches I have attempted to portray my impressions of how she captured her prey.

With partly folded wings, the owl would plummet down, suddenly shooting its talons forward in the last split second. The mouse

was always hit with full force, the momentum of the owl's plunge sending the bird and its prey skidding several feet across the floor. It is breath-taking to imagine the force with which a Great Horned Owl must strike its prey.

The owl always seized the mouse just behind the head. Holding the struggling prey firmly, the owl would kill it with one quick bite into the back of its head. Then the owl would fly up to its perch carrying the mouse clenched in one foot. Invariably it first ate the head and organs of the thorax. Often the owl would then tuck the carcass into a corner near its perch, coming back to dine on the remainder about a half hour later.

The feet of the Boreal Owl seemed to me to be very dexterous. When eating small pieces of food her feet were used like hands to bring up morsels to her mouth in a very dainty manner. She usually ate with closed eyes, taking her time and seeming to enjoy each bit of food. Very often when the meat was sinewy or hard, she would first tenderize it by rapidly nibbling at it with her beak.





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