

Seen by a Seer

By **Boswell Belcher, Dilke.**



Photo by Elmer Fox

YOUNG GREAT HORNED OWL

I haven't seen anything of special interest for many moons but now that Christmas is over I thought I had better write something before the crows come back to herald another busy season — if only to let you know I haven't deserted the seers to become a watcher.

Last April I saw the largest flock of Sandhill Cranes I have ever seen or expect to see. I only wish I knew even approximately how many there were, but I must be satisfied to say there were many thousands. Mum and I were on our way to town one morning when I noticed them rising from the stubble field about a quarter of a mile away. We stopped, watched and listened as more and more kept rising until acres and acres and acres of cranes became clouds banking, reeling and finally drifting away amid the roar of their talking and wing-beats. I took two pictures, but the birds were too far away against the bright stubble and sky to give even an impression of the vastness of the flock.

Last summer we had two nests of Great Horned Owls in poplar bluffs on the farm. One day I found two young birds on the ground below their nest. I presume they had fallen out during one of the very strong winds we had in the spring as their nest was not too sheltered. They were nevertheless well cared for by the parents and lived to be much photographed, as well as banded for Stuart Houston. Although they grew

up, however, their lives were short— one was found dead on the road a quarter of a mile away later in the summer, and the other was caught in a crow trap at Gibbs on the other side of Long Lake, approximately 25 miles east of here, on September 30.

This winter we had a Rusty Blackbird (the first I have ever seen to recognize) here with us. It first appeared early in December and could be seen every day with the House Sparrows. There is plenty of shelter and food — grain, hay seeds, etc. — around the shelterbelt and barn yard, but the blackbird looked very cold on sub-zero stormy days and finally succumbed to the biting cold weather of the first week in January.

Mice seem to be unusually plentiful here this year. When we were taking some sheaves off an open bin of oats in mid-July the mice were jumping off in such numbers they reminded one of the Pied Piper leading the rats. This winter we find the same numbers in the year-old sheaf stacks and the damage in cut strings and shelled oats is most aggravating, but our friends the cats are having an all-winter field day as is evident by the many trips they make from the barn to the stack-yard even in the miserable sub-zero weather. We have some late September kittens and one afternoon while we were around the barn the two mother cats brought eleven mice to them.

We have no dog or sharpshooters about to discourage the jackrabbits from coming into the shelterbelt in the winter, but this year I found that the storms of early January had brought one to spend the day under the old car which has been demoted to sitting outside the garage. This is only half a stone's throw from the kitchen door and right beside the tractor shed where I go two or three times a day. Apparently the rabbit is less afraid of man and his machines than of its enemies in the field. I have often noticed how cats like to sit under a car. Probably the rabbit found the same benefit, only needing to watch for danger around him, and not from above.