

## The Rocky Mountain Screech Owl in Larimer County, Colorado

BY W. L. BURNETT

THIS owl (*Megascops a. maxwelliæ*) is quite a common resident in suitable places throughout the greater part of the county, extending into the mountains to about 7000 feet, but it reaches the height of its abundance along the foothills. To visit the haunts of this bird one has to follow the wooded streams, and as they lie off the usual course of travel, *M. a. maxwelliæ* is unfamiliar to all but naturalists. Altho usually nocturnal, they are frequently met with in the day time. You often see one napping on a limb close to a tree trunk, and when disturbed it seems to suffer little inconvenience by the glare of the day.

These creatures make their homes in hollow cotton-woods, box-elders and willows, and you can always locate them by the pellets which lie around. From the nature of the material and from what stomachs I have examined I think their principal food is mice, which are abundant. I am satisfied they do not nest in the same cavities they use for a winter home, as I have for several years made the rounds in winter and marked the inhabited trees, but not in a single instance have I found eggs in the marked trees. They sometimes appropriate the abandoned nests of the American magpies. Their eggs are not easily taken as the following account of a collecting trip will show.

In company with Mr. F. M. Dille we left Fort Collins one morning about eight o'clock, followed the Cache La Poudre river on the south side as far as Bellvue and returned on the north side, arriving home about three o'clock. After eating a lunch we went down the river (south) returning at eight o'clock p. m. with only two sets for the day's work, after covering about sixteen miles of timber. One was a set of four, badly incubated, the other of five eggs, nearly fresh, and as handsome a set as I ever saw. They were white and clear, while the four were very much nest stained.

What pleasant memories those collecting trips leave. As I am writing this, altho several years have passed, I can again see the nesting cavity, in which we took our set of four, in a cotton-wood tree which was leaning over a shallow pool, where minnows flashed their silver sides in the sunlight. Our set of five was found in a willow stub. I can still hear Dille making his great speech about how destructive *M. a. maxwelliæ* were to poultry. The cause of this burst of eloquence was the sudden appearance of a ranchman exclaiming, "What are you doing there?" just as I had made the important discovery that the nest contained five eggs. Almost invariably the nesting cavities are on the under side of a limb and we made several difficult climbs with the aid of a lariat rope.

That these owls sometimes become bold when driven by hunger, the following episode will show. There had been a week or two of severe weather, with about ten inches of snow on the ground. We had a pet canary hanging at the dining room window. One evening we were startled by a crash against the pane. There seemed to be a whitish object without, and on investigating we found the cause of our alarm to be a screech owl, attempting to reach the canary, for a meal. He was very persistent and repeated his attempt at frequent intervals until the light was removed from the room.