

A Fearless Great Horned Owl.—On February 23, 1929, I saw, to my great surprise, a very blackish (probably dirty) Great Horned Owl (*Bubo virginianus*) roosting in a large cottonwood tree which stands about ten feet back of my sleeping porch. The bird seemed utterly unconcerned over my presence and scrutiny, only following my movements with characteristic owl-head twistings. The weather at this time was cold, though not extremely so. On April 1, I again saw a great horned owl in the same tree, presumably the same bird noted in February. It was again seen on April 8, 9 and 13. On the last date it sat, at dusk, on the cross-arm of an electric light pole, seemingly watching for prey.

While I was looking at it, the bird regurgitated a pellet, which was later on found and sent east for identification of its contents. The Biological Survey reports that this pellet was made up solely of the remains of a Western Robin.

I believe that this owl was held to the neighborhood of my house and its adjoining park because of the ease of securing gray squirrels (introduced). These squirrels, in the absence of all natural food in Denver, have been for several years past taking heavy toll of young birds and birds' eggs.—W. H. BERGTOLD, *Denver, Colorado, July 19, 1929.*

On Pellets of Hawks and Owls.—The analysis of pellets ejected by raptors, both hawks and owls, has been used again and again as an absolute record of their food. To anyone who has kept a hawk or owl in captivity and has studied their reactions to different foods the error of such a record must be apparent; but few observers have done this in America. The only published notice that I have seen is a footnote on page 235, volume II, of Forbush's *Birds of Massachusetts*.

The simple fact is that raptors pluck birds very carefully as a rule, or else strip the skin and feathers off together, eating the meat only. Some species commence by swallowing the head nearly entire and this gives a certain record; others like the Marsh Hawk usually reject the head and gorge themselves on the breast only, if their prey is a large bird. A few feathers may be swallowed with the meat but these do not result in a pellet being ejected.

A mouse or mole is swallowed almost entire and larger mammals have a considerable portion of the skin and fur carried down with the flesh. The result is a pellet within twelve hours.

Two years ago I collected or examined all the large pellets I could find ejected beneath the big fir trees used by Bald Eagles on the coast of Vancouver Island. Practically every pellet consisted of a solid mass of grebe feathers with some small bone remains. Only in one pellet could I find any duck bones, the mandible of a golden-eye.

Now at the time I had the eagles under observation continually, and every day I could see them capturing their prey. This for the most part consisted of ducks, mainly scoters. Why did not the pellets contain duck remains? Simply because the ducks were plucked carefully. An eagle would spend half an hour or more dressing (or undressing) his capture before commencing to feed; the feathers from the high altitude of the towering firs drifted far over the forest. But a grebe is unpluckable and the skin and feathers were swallowed with the meat, resulting in a huge pellet next day. From an examination of these pellets an entirely erroneous estimate would have been made.

Further, pellets are almost indestructible and resist weather conditions for years. As resting places and nesting sites change ownership it does not follow that the present occupant was the origin of any or all of the pellets beneath the tree or nest. A notable instance of this was related to me by one of our foremost ornithologists. He found the Long-eared Owl nesting in the aspens of almost every coulee visited by him in southern Saskatchewan. The following year these same nests were visited and in every case were occupied by Horned Owls. These ferocious marauders might easily acquire a reputation as exclusive mouse eaters under such conditions, as the pellets of the Long-eared Owl would be in evidence at each nest.

The footnote already alluded to deals with a communication from Mr. C. L. Hauthaway and the observations embodied therein are most interesting and conclusive. Mr. Hauthaway has kindly allowed me to make use of these notes and I hope to be able to publish them in full later. The main facts of his letter are as follows.