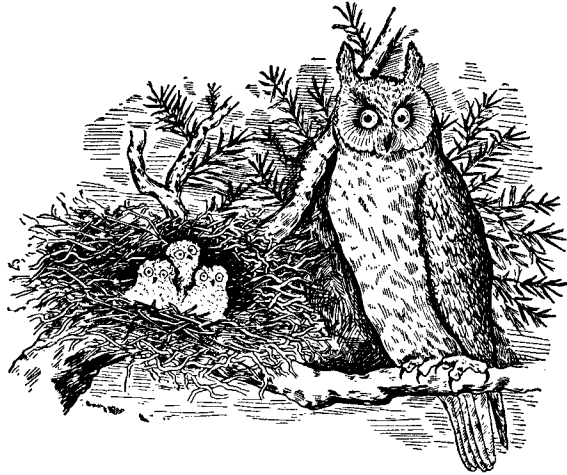


## THE AMERICAN LONG-EARED OWL.

*Asio Wilsonianus.*

BY DR. W. S. STRODE, BERNADOTTE, ILL.

This interesting *Bubonidæ* is not uncommon in suitable localities throughout the state of Illinois. From its shy and retiring habits it is not often met with by the casual observer. In thick groves and belts of young timber, bordering sloughs and small streams of water, it is most often seen.



AMERICAN LONG-EARED OWL.

In the Spoon River region of central Illinois, its eggs should be sought for from the middle to the end of March. The number of eggs seems to vary in different localities. In the eastern states three or four is the usual number. In the western states five is the average and six not uncommon.

In the spring of 1887 I found two nests, one containing four and the other five fresh eggs. In '88 two nests were found, each containing five eggs, some of them partly incubated, and, as I shall hereafter show, this record was beaten during the collecting season just passed.

On April 22d, '89, after making a professional visit afoot, I found myself ten miles from the village of Bernadotte, a fine collecting territory lying between me and my destination. About one-half the distance was along a small creek bottom, lined on either side by an occasional belt or grove of a dense growth of young oak timber.

With the hope of finding the nest of a "Zebra" Woodpecker, (*Melanerpes carolinus*) or of the Hairy, (*Dryobates villosus*) or possibly that of the Screecher, (*Megascops asio*) I was closely scanning every old willow and any other likely looking tree that came in my way.

A few rods off to the right of the creek, I finally discovered quite a bulky nest, which had the unmistakable appearance of being occupied by a bird of some kind. From my position on the side hill below, no sign of life could be seen about the structure; but as I approached the foot of the tree, an apparition of long ears and yellow eyes appeared over the edge of the nest and peered curiously down at me.

Buckling on my climbers I commenced the ascent, the owl remaining on the nest till half the distance to it was climbed. This fact led me to diagnose young birds, which conclusion was verified when I reached it, finding six baby owls of different sizes, all in the downy plumage. The nest also contained one Meadow Mouse (*Avicola riparius*.) Hearing a eat-like sound behind me on the side hill, I turned around to see what it proceeded from, when I was surprised to perceive one of the old owls on the ground, tumbling about among the leaves as though both legs were broken.

About forty feet away in another tree I discovered a new-looking crow's nest, but up to this time no crows in sight, when suddenly the owners of the nest appeared upon the scene, and discovering the owl tumbling about upon the ground, at once sounded the tocsin of alarm. In five minutes half a hundred crows were on hand to help expel this intruder. Coming down the owl tree I went up to the crows' nest to see what it might contain. I found in it five bare-bodied black imps, their red mouths widely opened, mutely, yet eloquently begging for something to eat.

In the meantime the owl had arisen from the ground and flown to a distant part of the wood, followed by all the crows except

two or three that remained to pay their respects to me. I did not care to molest either the owls or the crows, and getting down from the tree went on my way looking for further finds.

A quarter of a mile from these nests I came to another, from which I had taken last year a set of five crow's eggs. As soon as it came in sight, I could see that it was occupied, and on giving the tree a vigorous kick, a Long-eared Owl flew from the nest and perched upon a limb a few rods away. Quickly ascending, I found six young owls, also in the downy plumage, and on moving them about I found also one addled egg. The queer actions of the old birds, for the male had appeared, now attracted my notice. They were on a limb close together and seemed to be consulting as to what was best to be done under the circumstances. Swaying their bodies from side to side and bowing to each other in a most grotesque manner, every few seconds they gave utterance to sounds that closely imitated the quarrelings of a couple of tom cats upon a back yard fence.

Finally they seemed to have settled upon a plan to attract my attention and get me down from their nest. Jumping downward from limb to limb till they neared the ground, they tumbled into the leaves and rolled about in an apparently agonizing condition. To assist them in carrying out the deceit I rapidly descended, but when I reached *terra firma* they were nowhere to be seen. In this nest there was also one Meadow Mouse and the half of another. A few hundred yards further on I secured from a cavity in a half-dead willow four crystal-white eggs of the Zebra Woodpecker, and so my trip was not without an oological treasure.

But this experience with this, the most cat-like of the owls set me to reflecting, and the queries that arose in my mind were about on these lines: Why do the crows pay but little attention to the owls so long as they remain still or sit quietly upon their own nest; yet the moment one takes to wing are thrown into a perfect frenzy of excitement? And why is it if the owls are so destructive of bird life as many suppose, that they do not occasionally purloin young crows in the absence of the old birds, or, like the Indian, have they not yet come to crow? And also if field mice is the principal food of this owl, and it required on an average one mouse for each young owl every twenty-four hours, how many would be required to satisfy this brood of twelve for twenty-one days?

And further, I could not help but think what a find these thirteen would have been had I happened along here three weeks sooner; but I solaced myself with the thought that these groves would be a famous place to collect in next March.