

—THE—
ORNITHOLOGISTS' AND OOLOGISTS'
SEMI-ANNUAL.

VOL. 2.

JULY, 1890.

NO. 2.

THE AMERICAN SPARROW HAWK.

Falco Sparverius.

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

This beautiful little Falcon is quite common in the Spoon river country of central Illinois. In a ten-mile drive in the valley or along the bluffs, the observer may see many pairs of them during the spring and summer months.

They usually arrive between Feb. 20th and March 1st, and their food consist at this time largely of the Short-tailed Meadow Mice (*Avicola riparius.*) Of this little rodent vast numbers find a suitable home in the grassy sloughs and meadows along the river. Later in the season beetles and grasshoppers are added to their bill of fare.

On March 1st of this year the arrival of the first Sparrow Hawk was noted. On the 2d, five were seen and four of the number had in their talons a meadow mouse. They showed but little fear of me and would fly along the fence only a few rods in advance of my horse, the mouse dangling from the talons of one foot, presenting rather a comical appearance.

March 25th I went to a meadow near the village of Bernadotte to collect a series of Horned Larks (*Otocoris alpestris.*) Flying about over the field was a pair of Sparrow Hawks, eagerly searching for a breakfast of meadow mice, dashing from one locality to another, and facing the wind, which was blowing quite fiercely, they would poise in mid-air, and, with tremulous wing,



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remain in almost exactly the same spot for a minute or two, head lowered and tail spread like a fan. Nor did the reports of my gun appear to disconcert them much.

Some of the dashes across or down the wind were made with lightning-like rapidity and set me to calculating as to what this bird could do on the wing if this speed could be maintained for a few hours. Space would be almost annihilated, or the distance between St. Louis and Chicago covered in one hour's time.

Although I remained in this field for an hour I saw no capture and *Mr. Sparverius* seemed destined to go hungry, the mice doubtless preferring their warm, cozy nests beneath the sod to braving the sharp, piercing wind on the surface.

The field was full of the Larks but they seemed to pay no attention to them. Doubtless they occasionally vary their bill of fare by capturing small birds or young chickens, yet I have never seen them doing so. Wilson and one or two other observers claim to have seen them in possession of a full-grown Bobwhite that they had captured.

Their full complement of eggs, at least in Illinois, is almost invariably five. In the score or more sets which I have taken this rule has not varied, where there was reason for believing that the lay was complete. In the J. P. Norris collection, of Philadelphia, there are 12 sets of 4, 14 sets of 5 and 1 set of 6 eggs. Dr. J. C. Merrill, U. S. A., collected twenty-five or more sets in Montana. He says: "In nests found along the lower streams, 5 eggs are the usual complement, while those in the mountains usually contained fewer. Of the nests examined most were in cavities in trees, either natural or made by Flickers. The eggs were placed on a slight bed of leaves and grasses, or a few chips, or on the bare wood. Holes of suitable size and shape, in rocky cliffs or river banks were also used for nesting places."

All the nests that have come under my observation with one exception have been in cavities of trees, and no lining of any kind has ever been found in the nests. The one exception is in the spire of a church in Iable Grove, Ill. Here, an hundred and fifty feet from the ground, a Woodpecker had worked a hole, and for several years in succession a pair of Sparrow Hawks have raised their young. Perhaps no other *raptore* can compare in beauty and elegance with a series of sets of the eggs of this little hawk.

As a personal reminiscence is always in order, I will close this article by recounting my experience for the present season in the search for a series of sets.

April 28th was the time I had fixed upon as about the proper date to find the lay complete, and at noon of this day, having made all my sick calls, I threw dull care to the wind, and, accompanied by my twelve-year-old son, started out for an afternoon of it. We carried with us collecting box, a sharp hatchet, a ball of string and climbers. Thus equipped, we made rapid strides for a tract of large timber, on the river, three miles below the town.

This bit of forest of an hundred acres or more has not yet felt the devastating and destroying hand of man, and has remained almost in its pristine beauty. Here in the beautiful springtime, when nature is donning her finest wardrobe, budding trees, blooming flowers, the rippling river, and song of birds, I have whiled away many an happy hour in the intense enjoyment that can only be felt by one thoroughly in love with nature and all her creatures. Back from the river's bank, a forest of walnut, elm and ash formed a dense shade for the Easter lilies, ox-eye daisies and touch-me-nots that carpeted the earth beneath. Nearer the water a fringe of silver-leaved maples, while at the river's edge, in their drooping grace and rhythmic response to every passing breeze, the willows dipped their graceful branches to the water's edge.

Towering far above all were the great sycamores and cottonwoods, mighty giants of a by-gone age, standing like colossal sentinels over the surrounding forest, so straight and unbending that no convulsions of nature seemed to have disturbed them. In these grand trees were to be found the objects of search, the nests of the Sparrow Hawk. Here many pairs of them nest every season. No trouble to locate the nests, but to get to them, almost among the clouds, was no easy matter.

In a few minutes we had rapped a female *Sparverius* from an old Flicker hole, up a hundred feet or more, in a "syc" four or five feet through. As the sap-sprouts put out almost from the ground up, the ascent was made without much difficulty and five eggs were secured.

The next find was in a cottonwood, with not a limb for fifty feet. I did not care to trust my 187 lbs. to the rough bark while

climbing this distance and we passed on. The next nest was in a giant buttonwood, and up so high that it almost made one's head swim to look up to it. The tree itself, from the ground, would have been unclimbable, but growing under it was a water elm about two feet in diameter. The top of this tree just well reached the lower branches of the "syc," and by ascending it I was enabled to get over into the buttonwood, and then on up to the Flicker hole, containing the nest. Enlarging the cavity with the hatchet which I carried up in a strap around my waist, I secured the eggs, which were again five in number.

These are representative climbs, and the collector with a cool head, plenty of determination and hard muscles could secure many sets at the proper season along the Spoon river valley.

Suffice it to say that we secured two more sets on this trip, one of five and one of four. In each case the eggs we put into a mitten to which the fish-cord was attached, and then lowered to the ground. Upon blowing they appeared fresh or nearly so. I presented much the appearance of having been rolled in a flour-barrel. We arrived at home at sundown tired and very hungry, but happy and well satisfied with our afternoon's work.

Long live the pretty *Falco Sparverius!*

"GEORGE."

BY H. H. BRIMLEY, RALEIGH, N. C.

The death of his mother from "lead poisoning" caused George to be left an orphan at an early age. I found the youngster in a hollow tree, and, knowing his unfortunate circumstances, I carried him home and adopted him and he remained with me until he was well grown. I may as well state here that George was a bird—a Barred Owl—and that his mother was shot by myself before I knew of his existence.

When first taken he was a mere mass of long, soft down, dirty white in color, with a pair of large, staring, black eyes. After getting him safely to the ground, the problem arose of getting him home, the distance being several miles. After one or two