



# OKAY, Mr. OWL and Mr. HAWK

## --- ALL IS FORGIVEN

By Oren Arnold

**A**FTER many years of bold robbery and killing, two notorious American thieves are about to receive their just deserts.

Government agents—G-men, if you will—and others who know most about them, have developed some new clues and theories recently, so that rather startling facts can be revealed.

The "just deserts" of the notorious pair is—protection! As quickly as citizens can be made to understand it, the bandit pair will be let strictly alone, allowed to go right on with their business of death and destruction.

The two killers are the hawk and the owl, aerial raiders known and despised for a century or more.

It is virtually an American tradition for the farmer's boy to get out the old shotgun and shoot the hawk that is soaring over the chicken yard. The chickens themselves, rest assured, are making him out a gangster, a cutthroat, a villain, a murderer, and a fiend.

Even worse, in a way, is the nighttime raiding of the owl. That ominous thing with the staring eyes steals baby chickens, too, and goodness knows what all else. He is—why he's terrible! They say he sucks blood of horses in the Carolinas. They say he calls for the soul when a person dies in Texas. They say he causes crops to fail in California, and they say he is a harbinger of death in Massachusetts. They say.

**SCIENTISTS** within the past five or six years, and more definitely within the past year, have verified what they thought they already knew—that hawk and owl are most valuable if left strict-

The barred owl is the fellow who sits on a limb on moonlight nights and wants to know "Who—whoo—whoo—are you?" . . . At right, down like a bullet, the hawk dives, wings outspread, feet open for the catch.



Owls aren't so vicious after all. Here's a tame short-horn owl that is its tiny mistress' favorite pet.

an owl, you shoot the bird that would normally destroy maybe a dozen gophers and rats. The hawk might once a year steal a chicken worth one dollar. But the dozen gophers and rats left alive would destroy \$100 worth of your grain or garden crops.

**BUT** what about the song birds, and the colored gems of the garden?

"The mortality in our common birds has to approach something like 50 to 80 per cent every year, or we would be overrun by them," says Richard H. Pough, of the Audubon Societies. "Therefore the hawk does no harm, provided it kills no more than half the birds in a vicinity, but in the eyes of nature probably benefits the small bird species.

"Furthermore, the hawk benefits the smaller species on which it preys by eliminating continually weak, injured, diseased birds, and allowing the future generations to come from the strongest and healthiest that are best able to escape."

Finally, there is one more clinching argument—predatory birds such as hawks and owls get more rodents than anything else, and rodents (especially rats and gophers) cost American people more in destroyed food than any other agency. Killing a hawk may save the lives of two quail and two chickens, but spare the lives of ten times as many highly destructive rodent pests.

The owl especially is a friend of man in the destruction of rodents, but it is difficult to get most people to understand that, the scientists declare. Owl takes over the night shift of aerial raiding, when hawk is content to go to roost as "respectable" birds do.

Two common barn owls will destroy more rats, mice, and gophers in a year's time than will a dozen cats. But the two owls will also upset the emotional stability of the farmer's entire family, unless the people are exceptionally wise.

Owls do about 90 per cent of the ghosting that is done in America. A barn owl is a beautiful white creature, with a wingspread of three or four feet. In a dim reflected moonlight of your attic, your garage, or especially of an abandoned empty residence, the bird is an ideal phantom.

The barred owl is the ghost most likely to "haunt" you on lonely roads, as along the village cemetery. On moonlit nights this fellow seems to have an insatiable curiosity to know "WHO—WHOO—WHOO-ARE-YOU-U-U?" and he usually follows his question with a mirthless laugh.



The white barn owl, at left, which flies in absolute silence and can utter the most blood-curdling screech imaginable, provides America with most of its "ghosts."



ly alone. The national Association of Audubon Societies—greatest organization of bird specialists in the world—is just one of the agencies backing the predators' New Deal.

Many Americans, many who have felt themselves sincere naturalists, are going to be diehards. Farm folk especially are likely to go on shooting hawks and owls for a decade or so, or until the news eventually gets around and sinks in. You can't blame them. Habit is a strong thing, and if your prize Rhode Island Red pullet were snatched dramatically from under your nose some sunny afternoon, you too

would want to shoot the invader. That's the way it usually happens—dramatically.

The poultry yards will be quiet at 3 p. m. Old hens will be fluffed up in the shade of fig trees, and roosters will doze ungallantly on shady limbs.

Away off in the sky is a speck. Nature has given it uncanny eyes. Half a mile high, it can detect a morsel of food on the ground.

It lets out no battle call, no warning. Instead, its wings fold, its neck distends, its body streamlines—and down it plunges.

Down, like a feathered bullet, it dives

at the farmyard. Twenty feet up, wings check its speed, feet open in great clutching talons.

Faster, almost, than you can see it, the raider picks up a tender chicken and skims away out of sight over the trees.

Bird lovers, even as farmers, rise in indignation. Kill the hawks. It is a logical cry. But no longer, the scientists at last are agreeing. Nature meant for the hawk to kill the smaller birds, and it is a serious mistake to interrupt him.

And therein lies the key to the whole situation—when you shoot a hawk or