

SHORT-EARED OWL.

Strix brachyotos, *Lath.*

Otus Brachyotos, *Cuv.*

La Hibou brachyote.

THE Short-eared Owl is so universally dispersed as to render it probable that it may be observed over the whole of the four continents, with the exception of the high northern regions. We have ourselves been enabled to compare specimens of this species from the Straits of Magellan, Brazil, and North America, with others from every part of Africa and India, all of which were so strictly similar in their markings and size that it was impossible to distinguish them.

Unlike the rest of its tribe, which habitually reside among trees and rocks, the Short-eared Owl reposes on the ground, and prefers extensive moors and marshes to thickly wooded districts. Although it is sparingly dispersed during summer over the northern parts of England and Scotland, in which localities it is known to breed, still it must be regarded as a migratory bird both in the British Islands and the greater portion of the Continent. In Holland it is particularly abundant during the months of September and October, about which period it makes its annual migration to England, where it arrives in companies of from five to twenty or thirty in number, and gradually disperses over the marshes and extensive fields of turnips which border the whole of our eastern coast. Its flight is strong and vigorous, and from its diurnal habits it may be frequently observed, particularly in gloomy weather, on the wing at midday, hunting for small birds, mice, frogs, &c., which constitute its principal food.

When in a state of repose, it secretes itself on the ground, either in a tuft of long grass, heath, or among the thickest part of the turnips, and it is seldom roused from this retreat until closely approached. It is to be regretted that these secluded and retiring habits tend much to its own destruction by the facility with which it is discovered by the gunner with the assistance of his pointer, which will generally point on scenting it.

In a note in his valuable edition of Wilson's American Ornithology, Sir William Jardine informs us that he has found the nest of this bird on the extensive moors at the head of Dryfe (a small rivulet in Dumfriesshire), that the eggs are five in number, and that the "nest is formed upon the ground among the heath, the bottom of the nest scraped until the fresh earth appears, on which the eggs are placed, without any lining or other accessory covering. When approaching the nest or young, the old birds fly and hover round, uttering a small shrill cry, and snapping with their bills. The young are barely able to fly by the 12th of August, and appear to leave the nest some time before they are able to rise from the ground. I have taken them, on that great day to sportsmen, squatted on the heath like young black game, at no great distance from each other, and always attended by the parent birds."

Feathers covering the nostrils brownish white, with black shafts; circle immediately around the eyes blackish brown; remainder of the facial disk yellowish brown, mottled with blackish brown; circle of small feathers behind the facial disk mottled with tawny white, blackish brown, and white, except opposite to the orifice of the ear, where they are wholly blackish brown; on each side of the forehead four or five feathers somewhat longer than the rest, which are erected and depressed at pleasure; head, back, and wing-coverts dark brown, deeply edged with tawny brown; quills pale reddish brown, with several broad bars of dark brown on their outer webs; the inner webs are also barred, but not so numerous or so regularly as the outer; the tips of all ending in ashy grey; fore part of the neck and breast buff orange, each feather streaked down the centre with dark brown; under surface pale yellowish brown, with dark brown shafts; tarsi and toes dull yellowish white free from spots, the feathers assuming a hairy appearance on the toes; claws blackish grey; bill blueish black; irides gamboge yellow.

The Plate represents an adult male of the natural size.