

Genus STRIX.

GEN. CHAR. *Beak* straight at the base, the tip arched, and hooked; cutting margin of the upper mandible nearly straight; under mandible sloping to the point, and doubly notched. *Nostrils* oval, obliquely placed on the anterior ridge of the cere; facial disk large, complete. *Wings* long and ample; the second quill-feather the longest in the wing, the first but little shorter, equal to the third, and slightly notched on its inner web near the tip. *Legs* with tarsi long and slender, clothed with downy feathers; toes thinly covered with hairs; claws long, sharp, moderately curved, and all more or less grooved beneath.

BARN OWL.

Strix flammea, Linn.

La Chouette effraie.

WHETHER our well-known Barn Owl be identical with those found in almost every portion of the globe, notwithstanding their slight variations or differences of plumage, we have not been able satisfactorily to determine; and it yet remains a question whether the Owls so nearly resembling the present, from the United States, South America and its adjacent islands, together with others from Africa, India and New Holland, be merely varieties depending upon climate, food and a combination of circumstances, or, on the contrary, radically distinct, each constituting a different species.

The genus *Strix* as limited by modern authors, and taking this bird as its type, possesses, besides the varieties above alluded to, many which must certainly be considered as truly distinct species. Of these we have seen several from New Holland, one from India, and one from the West Indian Islands. It is a genus at once distinguished from all other genera of the family of *Strigidae* by the elongated bill, the loose and downy texture of the plumage, and by the beautiful style of colouring which pervades the upper surface of the body.

The *Strix flammea* is spread over the whole of Europe, and appears to be everywhere stationary, at least such is the case in our own island, where they inhabit barns, ruins, church-towers and hollow trees, remaining concealed all day, but issuing at the approach of evening, when they prowl, on light and noiseless wing, in search of their prey, night being the time when the species of this genus exert their powers and display their destructive energies. Dazzled by the light of day, for which their powers of vision are not adapted, they remain motionless and inanimate in their retreats, shading their eyes with the thin membranous veil which they possess for the purpose of drawing over the pupils. To observe them in this state, we should not suppose them endowed with that energy and quickness of action which they display at night, when, intent upon their search, they skim over the meadows with every sense alive to the object of their pursuit: so rapidly, indeed, do they pounce upon their victims, that even the little active mouse is seized before aware of its approaching fate. Although mice form the principal part of their subsistence, it is nevertheless certain that they sometimes prey upon young birds, rats and leverets; and instances have been known of their committing depredations among the finned inhabitants of lakes and ponds.

In the plumage of these interesting birds there exists considerable variety, some individuals being fawn-coloured on the upper and under surface, spotted and dashed with dark grey, while others are purely white on the under surface; and others again white on the same part, with minute spots of grey. So far as we have been able to judge from dissection, the individuals killed in this country with pure white breasts, as represented in the Plate, are invariably adult males, the females and young males having the breast more or less speckled, and the edge of the facial disk tinged with fawn colour.

The *Strix flammea* incubates in holes of trees, old buildings, and similar situations, generally laying three or four nearly round white eggs.

The young, for a considerable period, are covered with a thick coating of white down, and their retreat is always found to contain vast quantities of pellets or castings, consisting of the indigestible parts of their food.

The Plate represents an adult male of the natural size.