SYRNIUM ALUCO.

Tawny or Brown Owl.

Strix aluco, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 132.

— stridula, Id. ibid. p. 133.

Syrnium ululans, Savig. Desc. de l'Egypt, pt. i. p. 112.

— stridulum, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. pt. ii. p. 62.

— aluco, Cuv. Règn. Anim., 2nd edit. tom. i. p. 343.

Ulula stridula, Selby, Ill. Brit. Orn., vol. i. p. 102.

Aluco stridulus, Macgill. Desc. of Rap. Birds of Gt. Brit., p. 367.

Ulula aluco, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. iii. p. 438.

That the Brown Owl has many persecutors and but few friends is quite certain, his destructive propensities, particularly during the breeding-season, having called down upon him the maledictions of the game-preserver and the keeper; but this one-sided judgment is just the 'Farmer and the Rook' over again, no consideration for the good he effects being taken into the account. Were it possible for a pair of Brown Owls to produce a yearly record of the number of nocturnal moles, Norway rats, and destructive field-mice they have destroyed, against a similar account of what has been done in this way by any five keepers, I question whether the balance would not be in favour of the Owls. Let us remember that the whole face of our country is gradually changing-woodland districts giving place to arable lands; and that the situations favourable to the habits of this bird are becoming more and more circumscribed, and consequently that it is to our interest to protect, rather than to extirpate, the remnant of the species which remains. Let us then cherish the Brown Owl as a bird designed for an especial purpose; let us still hear its hollow, rolling hoot in the twilight, or listen to the challenge-note of the males—the only sound which breaks the stillness of midnight in those woodland parts of the country where it still lingers. For myself, and doubtless for many other persons, the hoo-hoo-hoots of this bird have a great charm, and, in my opinion, amply compensate for the loss of the few leverets it may take home to its craving young during the months of April and May. I believe the brown rat to be far more destructive to leverets and young pheasants than this Owl ever can be. Let the preserver of game, then, bear this in mind, and not raise his gun at every Owl that blindly tumbles out of a tree when the covers are shot over: if he mistake the Owl for a Woodcock, which I have heard offered as an excuse, his destructive propensities and want of judgment are about upon a par. Having said thus much in favour of the Brown Owl, I must now proceed to speak more particularly of its habits and economy, and especially of its varied diet. It not only kills the smaller quadrupeds above enumerated, but its prowling habit leads it to pounce, during the stillness of the night, upon sleeping Blackbirds, Thrushes, or any other species it can master; and, strange as it may appear, it also hunts the edges of pools and rivers and captures living fish; in support of which latter assertion, I shall quote some passages which have appeared in works on natural history and in the daily newspapers. I commence with the greater portion of a note on the subject, which appeared in the 'Magazine of Natural History' for the year 1828, p. 179:-" Probably it may not be generally known to naturalists that the Common Brown Owl is in the habit, occasionally at least, of feeding its young with live fish—a fact which I have ascertained beyond doubt. Some years since, several young Owls were taken from the nest, and placed in a yew tree in the rectory-garden here; in this situation the parent birds repeatedly brought them live fish, Bull-heads (Cottus Gobio) and Loach (Cobites barbátula), which had doubtless been procured from the neighbouring brook, in which these species abound. Since the above period, I have on more than one occasion found the same fish, whole or in fragments, lying under the trees in which I have observed the young Owls to perch after they have left the nest, and where the old birds were accustomed to feed them." (Rev. W. T. Bree, Allesley Rectory, near Coventry.)

"This circumstance," says J. M., on the same page of the Magazine, "is mentioned in Jennings's 'Ornithologia,' and corroborates a declaration made by a labourer who was employed to watch the fish-pond in the flower-garden at Bulstrode about fifty years ago. The gold and silver fish had been missed; the Duchess Margaret of Portland, being a lady of distinguished taste for every curious object of natural history, suspecting the pond had been poached, ordered the gardener, Mr. Agnew, to employ men to watch. The watchmen detected the robbers, when they saw them alight on the edge of the pond, and there waiting the approach of the fish, captured and devoured them! The Common Brown Owls were the robbers; at least, so the men reported, but they were not generally credited."

The following paragraph, copied from the 'Bath Journal,' appeared in the 'Times' of October 29, 1858:—
"An Owl's Larder.—A few days since an Owl's nest was taken upon the farm of Mr. Parker, Burnett's