

THE AMERICAN GOSHAWK NEAR OTTAWA.

BY G. EIFRIG.

The goshawk or blue henhawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) breeds in some numbers in the vast wooded area to the north of Ottawa. It is a large hawk measuring two feet from bill to end of tail, the wing expanse being three to four feet. It is a beautifully marked hawk. The adults of both sexes are bluish-slate color above, the under parts white, each feather being pencilled with black, producing a fine effect. The young ones are entirely different, brownish-black with some rufous above, and the feathers below being heavily *streaked* with black, not *barred* as the adults. Last fall they were quite common for a while around the city. Their flight is not the slow gliding of the buzzard genus. They fly low and swift and fall on their prey like thunderbolts, and when people come out of the house to look for the miscreant who carried away their chicken, they may happen to see a red-shouldered hawk gliding around above, and, taking him to be the author of the mischief, will vow vengeance, whereas the real author, the goshawk, or perhaps Cooper's hawk, who looks and acts much like him, is far away by this time, enjoying his meal. They are quite fearless, often carrying away chickens or game from the very feet of the husbandman or hunter. They would be real harmful to farmers and poultrymen were they not so rare in settled districts. But for what damage the quick-flying *Accipiters* do, the slow-gliding useful buzzards, *Buteo*, are blamed and punished, as the red-shouldered, red-tailed and broad-winged hawks. Of the accipitrine hawks, which closely approach the falcons in build, rapacity and swiftness, we have only the goshawk, Cooper's and the sharp-shinned hawk, of which only the last is at all common, and he is too small to do much harm to man. He confines his depredations to small wild birds, where he does much harm. In winter he sometimes enters cities, as three winters ago Ottawa, and makes himself useful to the community by doing away with an enormous number of English sparrows.

The following two incidents, which came under the writer's notice, show the fierceness of the goshawk. About May 15th, 1905, Mr. F. Sack, a farmer of Germanicus, Renfrew Co., went into one of his fields, which he had not visited for a while. Suddenly a large hawk swooped down upon him, sailed around him in uncomfortably close proximity to his head, struck at him with his claws, and all this with such fierceness that progress was impossible. He had to turn back. The next day he wanted to finish his tour of inspection, when the same thing

happened. He was absolutely forced to turn back. The next day, seeing that this hawk had established himself there and was making a practice of withholding his field from him, Mr. Sack took a gun along. Even this did not deter the hawk, which immediately resorted to the tactics of the past two days. This time it proved his undoing; a well directed shot put him out of commission. The farmer gave the bird to a friend, who mounted it, when it was seen by the writer.

One morning last February, Mr. Hugo Paeseler, a farmer of High Falls, Labelle Co., Quebec, went into his wood-lot near his house. Not far in, he noticed that a fierce battle must have been waged there not long before, because in a space of about ten by ten feet the freshly fallen snow was plowed up and liberally sprinkled with blood and feathers. Searching around for the principals of the fight, he found about ten steps away a large adult goshawk, wings spread, frozen stiff and pretty badly used generally. About the same distance in the opposite direction from the scene of hostilities, he found a barred owl, dead, but yet warm. It had alighted on a little spruce after the battle, from where it had fallen off, as the condition of the snow on the spruce and below showed, and then had crawled in a small log that lay with its hollowness right near the owl. Although she apparently had died later than the goshawk, she was more ripped up than he. The farmer, knowing the rudiments of taxidermy, skinned and "stuffed" the goshawk—in this case that is the appropriate word—of the owl he could only do so with the head, which he thus kept. They were later seen by the writer. The theory is that the goshawk sallying forth early in the morning in quest of prey, made a mistake and pounced upon the barred owl, which was probably then returning home from its nightly foraging. She, however, did not feel like being reduced to a breakfast for the goshawk, and so gave battle, with the result that both had no more use for breakfasts. It is not likely that the owl would attack the larger goshawk, but the goshawk, especially when hungry, does not let the size of his quarry deter him much. Last October a farmer in East Templeton, Quebec, near Ottawa, shot a beautiful adult female goshawk in the act of doing away with a large Plymouth Rock rooster. That fight in the snowy woods that morning must certainly have been a battle royal, and an interesting sight could one have witnessed it.

Ottawa, Ont., August 16th, 1907.



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