

REVIEW BOOKS RECEIVED

OWLS Their natural and unnatural history. John Sparks and Tony Soper. Taplinger Publishing Company, 206 pp., illus. \$5.95.

Sweet Suffolk owl, so trimly dight,
With feathers like a lady bright,
Thou singest alone, sitting by night,
Te whit, te whoo, te whit, to whit.
Thy note, that forth so freely rolls,
With shrill command the mouse controls,
And sings a dirge for dying souls,
Te whit, te whoo, te whit, to whit.

Anon

(from Chapter 6 *Owls – the Unnatural History*)

This well-done history, natural and unnatural (as above) written in non-technical language and illustrated with many fine pen and ink drawings by Robert Gillmor, is packed with information about owls the world over.

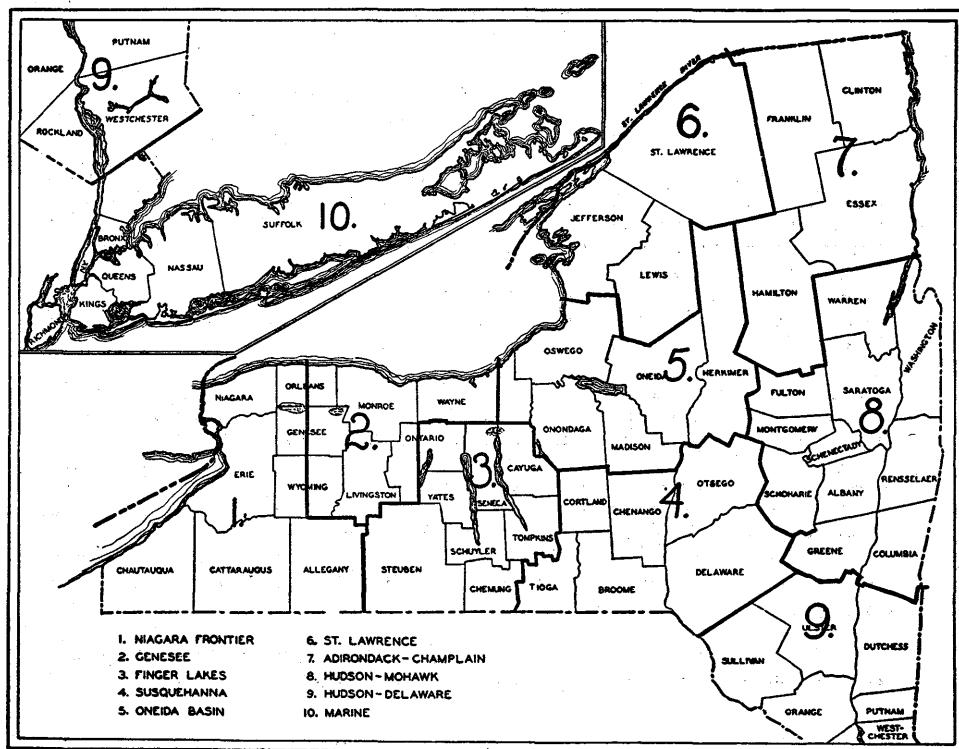
As the authors point out, everyone is interested in owls. With their upright, human posture, cheek-like facial disks and great round eyes, they have successfully disguised their true personalities as the bird version of the wolf in sheep's clothing. In spite of their real-life function as predators and their unhappy reputation as bearers of bad tidings and gloom, owls are fascinating birds.

This book describes how owls are designed to cope with darkness, their courting, nesting and hunting habits and their place in our ecosystem. There is a chapter on owls' relationship with man over the centuries, coming to the conclusion that the birds have not fared too badly. In the chapter entitled "Owls of all shapes and sizes," to me the most interesting in the book, the evolution of owls is traced from the sixty million year old *Protostrix mimica*, whose fossil remains have been found in Wyoming, to the 133 species that have survived today – all the way from the Least Pygmy Owl of Mexico, smaller than the Elf Owl of our southwest, to the great Eagle Owl of Europe, six or more inches taller than our Great Horned. The relationship between the owls as nocturnal hunters and the hawks as diurnal hunters is discussed, as well as the competition between owls and the other crepuscular feeders, the bats and the goatsuckers.

Mr. Sparks and Mr. Soper have put together a fine account of these birds of prey, and it should be recommended reading for all who are interested in them.

J.W.T.

REPORTING REGIONS



For descriptions of Regions see Kingbird Vol. IV, Nos. 1 and 2