

SHORT EARED OWL SETTLING ON EGGS, SITKA SPRUCE PLANTATION

In miles of sapling spruce
she settles,
small in those miles as a comma in a book,
the bird of hooks and big plush softness,
her eyes of fire
across two decades
outstaring the viewer's look.

Both she and her chicks long dead,
in a thirtieth of a second then
in Clauchriehill plantation
the shutter clicked and locked her
like a trophy of light in the magic box,
so here in your sight she lives again
in her fierce motherhood
before politics, geography, nation.



The short-eared owl, *Asio flammeus*, takes its name from little feather tufts above the eyes, which are only visible when the bird is relaxed. The real ears are huge, and found under skin flaps on each side of the bird's facial disc. It flies and hunts by day, often nesting in spruce plantations where its favourite prey, the short-tailed vole, is abundant.