

THE AUK:

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF

ORNITHOLOGY.

VOL. XX.

APRIL, 1903.

No. 2

THE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS OF BOB-WHITE.

BY JOHN N. CLARK.¹

TO THE man who keeps his eyes and ears open, there are new sources of entertainment and instruction bursting upon his vision at every turn. They often come as surprises — for Nature, ever prolific in resource, offers a new program at every interview. Such were the thoughts that suggested themselves as I took the pen to recount a little episode that afforded much entertainment for me the past summer.

I frequently observed during later June and early July a stately Bob-white stationed on a post near at hand where at early morn and fading day he called out with great energy his weather prognostications with little favor to the haymakers, as if he were a trusted employee of the Weather Bureau.

By the roadside in that immediate vicinity grow numerous patches of what I call scrub. There are hazel scrub, wild rose scrub, and blueberry and dwarf willow scrubs — annually mowed. Mowing does not destroy or discourage them, but puts them in the form so popular in Japan when practiced upon trees kept in plant form by trimming and training. These scrubs, cut to stubs from six to ten inches, renew their annual leaf and vigor and afford nice

¹[This article has a sad interest, owing to the death of the author since the manuscript was received for publication. See 'Notes and News' in the present number of 'The Auk'.—EDD.]

runways for small birds and quadrupeds beneath their green cover, and often a nice nesting place for Madam White, as I have several times observed in the passing years. This year circumstances detained the mowing till Tuesday, the fifth day of August. I hesitate somewhat from fixing this as the exact date as I had no interest at the time nor any thought of the subsequent interest involved. I know it was Tuesday and am strongly impressed with its correctness. Early in the afternoon I took a walk up the road to inspect the progress of my employée and found him skillfully clipping away the weeds and shrubbery that had sprung up by the roadside. Almost his first casual remark was, "There is a quail's nest in the shrubbery the other side of the road." A quail's nest, thought I, pretty late in the season for Bob-white to set up domestic affairs. But my curiosity led me to the spot and a little inspection. Old Bob sprang up out of the shrub with startling whirl of wing and dropped into a small growth of bush a few rods away. The nest was built in a scrub of blueberry bushes that had been cut about ten inches from the ground year after year, interwoven with the annual growth of grasses and weeds pertaining to a wayside. The nest was a neat little bower, deftly woven, covered and concealed. Only a few steps away was the public road with teams, pedestrians and even dogs passing every hour of the day. But little recked Bob-white in his cozy nest for, as I have already intimated, it was Old Bob had possession and twelve, clean, white eggs. A moment's inspection sufficed to satisfy my curiosity and I quietly withdrew to avoid any possible diversion in the domestic affairs of the White family.

It was about this time, or shortly after, in crossing a field a few rods back of this nest, I was startled to find myself in the midst of a flock of young birds, juvenile Bob-whites about the size of an English Sparrow, upspringing on every side and scurrying in every direction, evidently proud of their ability to take wing, though of little use would that be to protect them from old Tabby's paw had she been in my place. What attracted my special attention was the fact of only one old bird being with the flock of little ones and that bird a female Bob-white. I would add further that this flock was observed several times in the following weeks and always with one solitary guide and protector, and that one the mother.

Tuesday, the twelfth day of August, in passing the spot I thought of the White family and turned aside for a moment's interview. I found 'Old Bob' still on guard, promptly responding, relieving himself in haste from his nursery duties with evident solicitude. It brought one matter of interest to my mind, the dictum of a recent writer in one of our ornithological publications that Old Bob never took upon himself any share in the domestic cares and responsibilities of his household, not even to the bringing an occasional tidbit to the wife absorbed in household duties, yet here he was faithfully discharging the whole duties of overseer, house-keeper and wet nurse. And I will add that during the whole period of observation there was no appearance of Madam White at the premises. The nineteenth found 'Old Bob,' ever faithful, unwearied in his devotion to the household and its cares, and my interview was a very brief one.

The twenty-sixth day of August, I was thinking what a fine thing it would be if I could catch 'Old Bob' as incubation was complete and the babies cuddled together in their nursery just ready to launch forth upon life's weary wanderings mid swarming enemies. What a prize it would be for my camera! But no such good fortune awaited me and no change appeared in the household affairs of the White family.

September second; another month opens on the scene and it occurred to me that if Old Bob should get out a brood they would make poor broilers for the Dogs of War so soon to be let loose, October first being only one month away. Old Bob burst upon the scene with his usual vigor, the same startling whirl of wings to which my nerves could never get reconciled, dropped in his old place and began to whine piteously. I peeped into the nest to find everything unchanged.

"Poor Bob," said I, "right sorry I am for you. All these weary weeks, in storm and sunshine, faithful to life's duty as you view it, and all for naught"; and here I fell to blaming myself for the disturbing interviews that might have wrought this disastrous end to all his care, and I went away feeling the deepest sympathy and regret for poor Bob.

My sympathy and regrets were all wasted. The morrow found the nest deserted, and only empty shells neatly cut in halves, as if severed by an expert with sharp tools, filled the nest.

A recent author on ornithological subjects arranges a list of birds into two classes, one, like the sparrows, that annually rear two broods in the season; and one, including Bob-white, never rearing but one. This little episode does not prove him incorrect and yet there are points circumstantially convincing to my mind that he was mistaken.

It was just one month after the events narrated above. October had come: the Nimrods had put on cap and boots and the fusillade had already begun, but not yet near. I was reading quietly in my chair when I was startled by the heavy report of a gun, fired evidently only a short distance away from my yard but the scene invisible by intervening foliage. A little later I saw go marching proudly by, a boy with a big gun in one hand and a big male Bob-white in the other, great triumph sparkling in his eyes. He probably feasted that night. Menu — Quail on toast, seasoned with a mayonnaise of glory.

OCCURRENCE OF THE EMPEROR GOOSE IN HAWAII.

BY H. W. HENSHAW.

THE present season of 1902-03 bids fair to be a notable one as regards the occurrence of North American birds in the Hawaiian Islands. About the middle of October there occurred a heavy northeast trade storm, and, coincident with it, an unusually heavy flight of ducks and geese reached the island of Hawaii. Flocks of the former, consisting of scores, and even of hundreds, were reported from various points on the windward side. The ducks were mostly of two species, viz., the Pintail (*Dafila acuta*), and the Shoveller (*Spatula clypeata*). Although these two species are of annual occurrence upon all the islands of the group, where they winter, they have not been known in such abundance upon the island of Hawaii, not a favorite with ducks, for many years.

Among the flocks were doubtless not a few individuals of species