

Casual Observations on a Colony of Black-crowned Night Herons.

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DOUTBLESS ornithologists were surprised to see a nesting colony of Black-crowned Night Herons spring up in the city of Alameda, and have not ceased to expect strange things—the time when women no more adorn their headgear with any bird but English Sparrows—when all oologists blow fresh eggs with small holes and Duck Hawks learn to change their roost after having been robbed five or six times a season. I often wondered why the numerous Black-crowned Night Herons that roosted in the tall trees in town used them for a diurnal skulking place only and never nested within my recollection, although in 1883 I found two or three large, flat nests composed of sticks, in an oak grove frequented by these herons. It was not until 1898 that a nest was discovered in any of the roosting places and it is reasonable to conclude that eggs would have created young herons whose clamorous noises would have indicated their presence to anyone living within five hundred yards.

The 10th of May is the date I had fixed in previous years to obtain complete sets from the colonies I knew of in the county, and having climbed to the top of a tall cypress on our premises and found young almost able to fly on June 23, would indicate the parents began nesting at the common period. I was attracted to the tree by hearing the noises of the young the night before and was at the time over three hundred yards distant in an air line. The dense tree also held at the same date two nests of two eggs each, a nest of three young, unfledged, that snapped viciously at my fingers and coughed up the contents of their stomachs that had a "kill-me-quick," muscular odor. This vomiting seems to be a common trait of self-defense with this bird as noticed in other colonies. Also the young climb away along the branches at the intruder's approach, with the agility of a tight-rope performer, and a very severe shaking of the branches is necessary to loosen their hold.

The next tree, close by, held a nest containing one egg and was found empty two days later. In the third tree several sticks were placed crosswise in a likely position for a nest, but no more were ever added. All the nests were at least sixty feet from the ground close to the tree tops and highest of all was a nest full of English Sparrows. They were easy to reach, being placed on small branches near the main limb and were flat affairs, averaging one foot in diameter and composed of dead twigs of cypress and locust apparently detached from the trees by the birds. No more eggs were added by June 30. The shells once encircling the young lay directly below on the ground and spatters of dried egg with fragments of shell on the trunk and limbs just below the nests gave a clew to a previous possible combat. The larger brood of young were now flying and the younger brood kept up their noise for several weeks, and as no sounds of young birds or egg shells were heard and seen from any other of the numerous trees except from one group of cypress, where shells and noises indicated three or four nests, I am conscious of having ascertained the total juvenile census for that year. The colony roosted by day in the thick evergreen, departing at dusk in Indian file with many a "squawk" to the salt marsh half a mile distant, as has been their wont for years.

In 1899, on May 23, I climbed a "new" tree and found six nests, invisible from the ground, as in all cases, on account of the height and density of the trees. One nest was easily reached and the second was rather risky to get at, both near the main limb. The eggs of two more far out on the branches were taken in with the aid of a small tin can on the end of a pole, and the other two were too far out to reach, but eggs were seen in them. The pole was maneuvered with tediousness and difficulty among the many branches. Of the first three trees mentioned for 1898, the first one contained two sets of eggs

which I removed, but subsequent sets were laid and young raised. Other high, gigantic trees were climbed, some having been trimmed up from the ground, rendering it necessary to use a ladder and a rope to gain foothold on the first branches. Small, weak branches for a few feet had to be overcome before firmer ones higher up were gained and a thick coating of accumulated guano and a sort of dust peculiar to thick evergreens which the heaviest rains fail to remove, many squeezes and contortions, the cumbersome work of bringing the pole and can being accomplished, standing room was frequently at a premium, and the swaying of the tree tops rendered it risky reaching for the eggs and it was safe only during intermissions to work the scoop on the eggs so as to insure no damage to them. Many nests were out of reach, so the pole was dispensed with nearly altogether and only several were "easy." All the nests held sets of three eggs except three nests of four eggs each, incubation fresh to far advanced. No young were noted. This data is also applicable to May 29.

In all, I judged there were sixty nests containing eggs, including those in trees not climbed, this being corroborated by the cries of the young emanating therefrom from one to two weeks later. Their racket continued as late as September in rare cases, so some sets were laid perhaps in late July. Their incessant din commenced about dusk and lasted long after daybreak. I slept outdoors most of the summer and listened to the din of a heronry in town whether willing or not. (If anybody calls this a "shitepoke" town there may be some consolation in the thought that I saw a Green Heron roosting on a front yard fence in the main street of Alviso). The usual note was a "chuck, chuck, chuck, chuck" continued for a few seconds, varied with a "chucka-chuck-chuck, chuck-chuck" with an occasional ghastly screech or squawk. One bird after another in the same nest would keep the concert up all night with casual intermissions, and two or more birds keeping their own time created a rag-time jargon highly ludicrous.

At times a series of guttural squawks and yells from one spot probably indicated a scramble for food from a returning parent rather than a disagreement, the noises suggesting anything sepulchral and uncanny. The nearest approach to the "quack" note of the adult were guttural hisses and a squawk resembling that of a half-grown chicken. Even in the sunshine of midday the birds were not altogether silent. The trees were all close to the houses and barns as if so chosen for protection, and several times I noticed young birds on the tops of chicken yard fences or feeding at the trough. Others were walking about industriously seeking food, probably bits of fish that had dropped from the nests to the dry, parched ground, and instead of seeking safety by flight would hop to the low limbs and ascend foot-over-foot. Some were captured before getting out of reach and gave vent to loud, most diabolical squawks, alarming the nearest adults to fly out of the trees, and fought viciously, striking with their beaks, open-mouthed, with necks hunched up ready to strike at the captor's eyes.

The adults returned from the marshes apparently at intervals all night judging by the renewed clamor of the young. They were noticeable at dawn approaching with steady wing beat that changed into a long glide down an inclined plane toward the trees, then a few flaps and they were hidden in the tree tops. Others arrived at intervals up to 10 o'clock, low tides seemingly influencing late feeding. The feeding of the young is done apparently by the process of regurgitation and I have never detected one carrying food in its beak. The common note of the adult is heard from dusk to sunrise, much more so at dusk. They are sociable and peaceable yet ludicrously timid and when harassed by blackbirds and small hawks or even frightened by gun fire or earthquakes they freely utter loud, guttural squawks indicative of the highest expressions of cowardice and fear imaginable, laughable in the extreme. During the day, in early spring especially, they often use a garrulous note, a sort of subdued "cluck," exactly re-

sembling the scraping of a tin pan with a spoon.

The Great Blue Heron is often found in the trees with this colony, being present chiefly at night, but I do not expect to see it nest. There is a smaller heronry of Black-crowns in the central part of Alameda near "Buck" Ward's house, over two miles distant, which was only started up this year, and the approximate number of thirty eggs taken was all the traffic would bear, if reports are correct!



Capture of a Condor in El Dorado Co. Cal. In 1854.

In the autumn of 1854, two men, Alonzo Winship, a former pony express rider on the plains, and Jesse Millikan, were acting as trackwalkers for the South Fork flume in El Dorado Co., Cal. Their cabin was situated between North and South Canyon, and one morning they noticed a large condor in a dead spruce tree, on the mountain side, below their cabin. Loading a rifle, one of the party started for the bird but it had disappeared. After breakfast Mr. Millikan started toward the head of the flume, whilst Mr. Winship went down the flume toward White Rock, eight miles away.

As he was crossing the aqueduct over North Canyon, he saw an enormous condor asleep at the base of a cliff that jutted about twenty feet above the flume. Surprised that the bird had not been awakened by his footsteps along the flume, he hesitated a moment, then decided to attempt to kill the bird. Having nothing but his shovel he threw it with all his force, striking the condor and breaking its wing. The condor, thus rudely disturbed, jumped from its perch, and running under the flume, started down the mountain toward the American River with Mr. Winship following closely after. The condor's broken wing impeded its progress, and finding its pursuer was gaining upon it, it turned savagely upon him and he was compelled to take refuge upon a granite boulder just out of its reach, realizing he had a dangerous enemy.

As the condor walked around and

around the rock of refuge, eyeing him revengefully, Mr. Winship called to Mr. Millikan who was not yet out of hearing. The latter thinking his friend had flushed a covey of grouse, stopped at the cabin on his way and procured his rifle. When in sight of his friend on his granite perch he called:

"What have you got 'Lonzo?"

"Oh! I've got the great grand daddy of all birds," was the reply.

The condor was in such a fury that it paid no attention to the new comer, but continued its circuit around the boulder, eyeing its prisoner who called to Mr. Millikan, "Look out or he will go for you."

Getting a good glimpse of the bird and amazed at its size, Mr. Millikan exclaimed, "We must not kill him; we must take him alive." After considerable planning, Mr. Millikan secured a long, clean, strong, cedar pole and succeeded in dropping it across the back of their quarry, and both men threw themselves upon it. The trapped condor fought so savagely with its beak that Mr. Millikan stripped his coat off over his head and muffling the bird's head, they were finally able to secure it. Carrying the bird to the house, they took some flour sacks, cutting holes in them and passing the feet through; they then prepared splints and properly set and adjusted its broken wing, and over all, they placed bandages securely. They fastened a trace chain to one leg, securing the other end to a post. The condor had plenty of room for exercise, but woe to any object that came within reach of its bill. It knew to a fraction of an inch just how far it could reach, and, within that limit nothing escaped minus the loss of a bill full of flesh, hair or clothes.

The packers who supplied the cabin with meat, brought quantities from the slaughter house, and it would devour five pounds of meat at one meal. The owners of the slaughter house desired it, and with much difficulty the bird was again secured, taken down the mountain and turned loose in the stockade of the corral, where it was boss of all, animate or inanimate. No dog ever tried conclusions with it twice. Finally