

FROM FIELD AND STUDY

Voracity of Albatrosses.—In 1851 I went on a voyage in an Arctic whaling ship, the *Uncas*. When about sixty miles south of the Cape of Good Hope, we killed a large male sperm whale, tho he took down one of the boats which attacked him before he finally succumbed. A violent gale prevented us from saving all the oil from the whale, before about a week had passed, during which many wandering albatrosses (*Diomedea exulans*) and other sea birds feasted on the carcass which was along side of the ship. The screams of the albatrosses could be heard above the roar of the waves and the piping of the wind in the ship's rigging. The albatrosses were ravenous, astonishingly so. The ship's cook took about a dozen pieces of blubber that would weigh from three to four pounds each, tied a stout string about three feet long to each, then knotted the free ends together and cast them among the albatrosses which were within a few feet of the ship. In a twinkling every piece of blubber was swallowed by a different bird, which upon realizing its predicament would start to fly and turn a somersault, or set its wings deep into the water and back away from the piece of blubber it had swallowed. Their throats are capable of great expansion, tho probably somewhat less so than that of the constrictors.

After the cook had repeated this performance several times he varied the entertainment by substituting about half a dozen pieces of rough triangular firewood for the blubber. These were as bulky as the blubber and as readily swallowed, and then disgorged again.—LYMAN BELDING, *Stockton, Cal.*

Sterna paradisæa in Southern California.—While rowing about the tide-water flats back of Terminal Island, near San Pedro, Cal., with Mr. Geo. S. Chambliss, Sept. 13, 1902, looking after migrants, we saw a flock of about twenty-five terns resting on a mud flat. They flew up as we approached and Mr. Chambliss shot one from the edge of the flock, when they all circled about with loud cries, being joined by a number of California gulls (*Larus californicus*). Another specimen was taken. Upon examination they proved to be the Arctic tern (*Sterna paradisæa*). On the return to the landing the same flock was again seen and an immature specimen secured. So far as I can learn the only other record of *Sterna paradisæa* from California is that noted in Grinnell's *Check-List of California Birds*, from Monterey.—FRANK S. DAGGETT, *Pasadena, Cal.*

The Number of Feathers in a Bird Skin.—Last summer I put in spare time in making a count of the feathers on a gull and a sparrow. As there is no prospect of being able to continue the same on other species I will give the record here. These are not estimates, but actual counts feather by feather.

Ammodramus sandwichensis. Body including tail feathers, 762; legs, 78; head and neck, 710; wings, 349; total, 1899.

Larus glaucescens. Head, 2620; neck, 803; back and interscapulars, 570; breast and flanks, 880; wings, 721 + 748; legs and tail, 202; total, 6544. RICHARD C. MCGREGOR, *Manila, P. I.*

Do Wild Birds Die Instantly?—Mr. Wm. Earl Dodge Scott, in an article on birds in *The Outlook* of July 5, 1902, has made a statement that is somewhat remarkable in that it shows how differently Nature reveals herself to different observers, and especially remarkable because so emphatically backed up by his reference to hunters and others whose occupations teach them to observe. He states that not only do birds die instantly—which term must be here used in a comparative sense, and is a little strong—when injured or afflicted with illness, but also that, in all his experience he has never come across a sick bird or animal in a wild state, nor met any one else who has done so. My attention was attracted by this statement, because, although Mr. Scott probably has had much greater opportunities for observation than I, my experience has been very different from his. This may perhaps be accounted for by the mildness of climate or a lower proportion of bird enemies in the Pacific Coast collecting grounds, but it is a fact that occasionally sick or suffering birds and animals are to be found in California. For example, I have found dead seabirds along the shore, with no signs of their having been injured, in a greatly emaciated condition showing that they had suffered for some time before death. I have shot land birds that were woefully thin and weak, and have even taken one or two that were so afflicted with some cutaneous disease that it seemed advisable not to handle them. The California Jack rabbit suffers to a great extent from lumps caused by a parasite, and these are sometimes so large and weaken the animal to such a degree that it can hardly get out of one's way.

Besides eye witnesses who can verify some of these observations of my own there must be others who have had similar experiences, and consequently Mr. Scott's statement can not be accepted as an absolute rule.—JOSEPH MAILLIARD.