

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 wofully 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.

[My own experience agrees perfectly with that of Mr. Mailliard. During December, 1900, while at Monterey Bay I saw a Heermann Gull and many emaciated Brandt Cormorants which were dying a slow death, and only yesterday (Dec. 22, 1902) saw another during a short walk near the Point Pinos Light. On Laysan Island, Hawaiian Group, I saw a number of sickly birds among the seafowl, and found a very rare petrel in this condition. Mr. Scott's rule does not obtain among mammals for beside the example offered by Mr. Mailliard, I found a large sea lion near Cypress Point which existed for days in a perfectly helpless and moribund condition until Professor Harold Heath and myself mercifully killed it. Dissection showed no internal injuries nor parasites, while the teeth rather pointed to old age.—W. K. F.]

The Fall Migration of *Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*.—The fall migration of the mountain quail (*Oreortyx pictus plumiferus*) appears to be influenced but little by the food supply or temperature in its summer habitat in the Sierras which it appears to leave because the proper time has arrived for its annual tramp down the west slope. The first flocks start about the first of September, or sometimes two or three days sooner. At Webber Lake after three cold cloudy days, they began to move westward August 28, 1900. When they are migrating their whistle is frequently heard, and they do not seek cover for protection but follow a wagon road, railroad, travel in snow sheds, pass near dwellings, and seem to care but little for self preservation.

Several flocks used to come down to the foot of Stanfield Hill, Yuba County, which for eight years was my favorite shooting grounds, and there spend the winter. They would arrive about the middle of October. One year they did not come at all, and I wondered if they could foretell the mildness or severity of the coming winter, for that winter was a mild one, excepting that October was unusually cold and stormy. Their regularity in leaving the mountains without regard to food, temperature, or size of young has mystified me quite as much as *Anthus pensilvanicus*, and other northern breeding birds which I found in southern Lower California. Why they should remain in the tropical climate of Cape San Lucas until the first of May and then depart for their northern breeding grounds at the same time when they start north from the much more northern Central California puzzled me, for there was no perceptible change in climatic conditions about the first of May, and indeed scarcely a change in them, at the Cape, during the two or three preceding months.—LYMAN BELDING, *Stockton, Cal.*

Do Quail, *Lophortyx californicus vallicolus*, Remove Their Eggs?—One evening last spring as men were mowing the meadow, I went out to look for quail nests. In all I located eight nests, containing from three to eleven eggs. The following morning I revisited the nests and was surprised to find that four were empty.

Passing outside the field I flushed a quail from a nest containing six eggs which I recognized as a clutch (then of five) I had seen in the field the previous day. I am positive these were the same eggs as I could not mistake the peculiar marking of two of them. This second nest was forty feet from the other and on slightly higher ground. Is this characteristic of the birds? If so, how do they remove the eggs?—ERNEST ADAMS, *Clipper Gap, Cal.*

Frozen Toes.—I shot a golden-crowned sparrow the other day near Palo Alto that shows a curious mutilation of the feet. The outer toe of each foot is thickened and gnarled so that the joints can hardly be distinguished. A stump of the bone or claw protrudes at the tip. The whole thing reminded me of the way chickens' toes look after being frost-bitten. The sparrow, as shown by the skull, was of a last year's brood, and might have tarried in its northern home last fall until a hard freeze set in. I have seen similar scars on bird's feet before, but I can't just now remember what species. Perhaps someone can suggest a more reasonable explanation.—JOSEPH GRINNELL.

Food of Anna Hummingbird.—In December, 1901, I collected a female Anna hummingbird which had eaten thirty-two green tree-hoppers, one spider, one fly, apparently a *Simulium*, and other insect remains which could not be determined.—F. C. CLARK, *Napa, Cal.*

Wood Ibis in Southern California.—The wood ibis (*Tantalus loculator*) is so rarely noted in Southern California that a flock of twenty-five seen by Joseph Grinnell and myself from the train, on the margin of a tide flat one-half mile north of Oceanside, August 5, is of especial interest. This is the first time we have seen it on this coast and the records of other observers are few and far between. On August 15, Mr. G. H. Coffin shot one from a pair at Bixby, Los Angeles Co., but not knowing of its rarity it found its way into the pot and proved "not very good eating." I was able to identify it by its head and wings.

On August 23, Mr. Coffin and T. L. Duque went out purposely for the other one and were fortunately able to secure it. Through their kindness it reached me in good condition. It