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## JUNE WITH THE BIRDS OF THE WASHINGTON COAST.

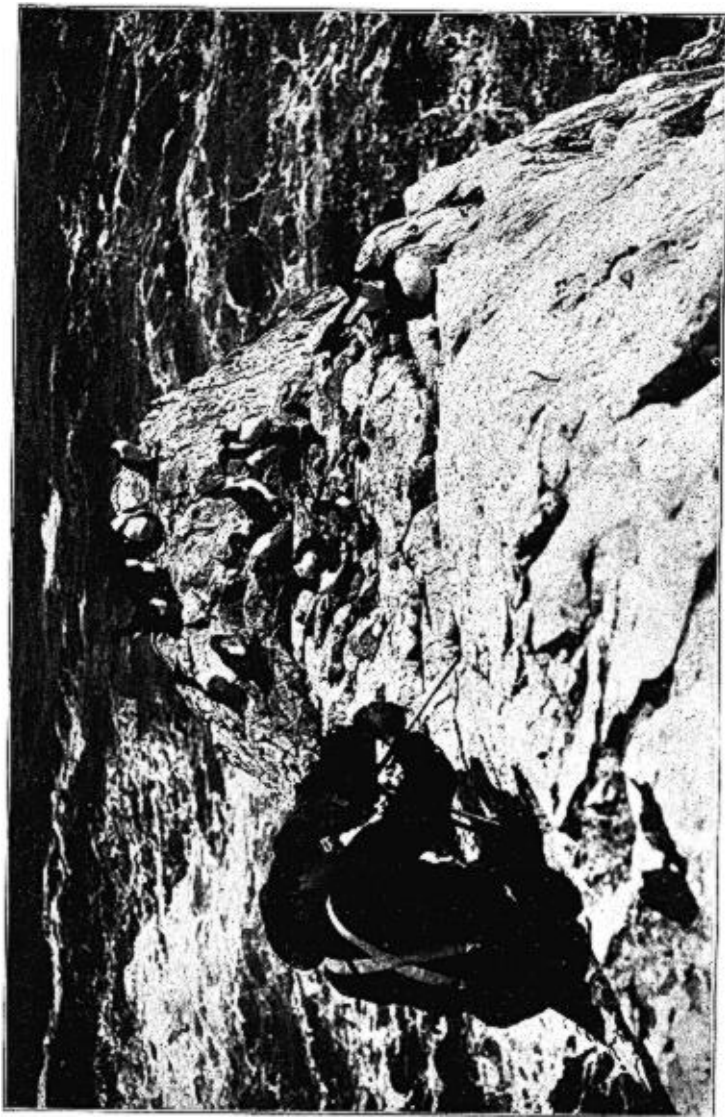
LYNDS JONES

Carroll Islet had been the center of attraction from the beginning of our plans, and here we expected to spend at least a full week, weather permitting. Certain it is that a cozier place to make camp and a more favorable place in which to study the ocean birds in their home life it would be difficult to find anywhere. At daybreak, with an orchestral background of gull croakings, there trickled forth from the fringing brush the exquisite song of the Western Winter Wren, and echoing again beneath the canopy of spruce branches there pealed forth the song of that prima donna in feathers, the Sooty Fox Sparrow. Out of the great, hustling, jostling, dissatisfied man-made world into this little Eden!

Second in point of numbers of the birds of Carroll Islet comes

### TUFTED PUFFIN (*Lunda cirrhata*.)

The only places where this species was not present and nesting were the rock precipices and the forested area, except, of course, the ledges, which were wholly occupied by Murres and Cormorants. Even the fringe of dense brush contained many nests. It is well known that the typical nesting habit of these birds is to find or make a burrow, usually among the rocks. The most of such burrows observed seemed to have been



California Murre (*Uria troile californica*). Shoulder ledge colony at close range. Carroll Islet.

cleared of debris by the birds, and some of them had clearly been made by the birds without much, if any natural cavity, to mark the beginning. An occasional burrow was so shallow

Carroll Islet.

Figure 2



Tufted Puffin (*Lunda cirrhata*). Posing for his picture, at the mouth of the nest burrow.

that the bird or egg could be seen, but most of them extended a number of feet into the ground. In walking over a turf-covered steep slope one needed to be careful not to break

through these burrows and take a headlong tumble. In climbing such a steep slope the mouths of the burrows afford a comfortable foothold. In descending such a slope rapidly you are more than likely to have the leg bearing the most strain bumped just behind the knee by a frightened bird as it rushes headlong from its nest.

Carroll Islet.

Figure 3



Tufted Puffin. (*Lunda cirrhata*). About half of the usual numbers, seen here.

One of our pleasant surprises with these birds was the finding of some nests beneath the thickly matted salal bushes, but without the semblance of a burrow. Clearly the birds considered the bushes a sufficient protection from marauding enemies, and were content to simply arrange their nest material upon the ground. The egg in the illustration is in such a nest. If birds reared in such nests could be tagged and so recognized on their return, it would be interesting to note whether they adopted the modified nesting habits of their parents or reverted to the ancestral method of burrowing.

The nest material was such as could be picked up within a few feet of the nest or the mouth of the nest burrow, and was merely arranged into a mat and trodden down in the middle. A single egg is deposited, and there is no evidence that there

is more than one breeding a year. The egg is probably nearly white when freshly laid, but it very soon becomes grimy from contact with the bird's feet and wet plumage. All of the eggs collected showed decided shell markings of purplish after careful washing, some of them being distinctly marked, others faintly so. The character of the markings seems to indicate that the eggs of the immediate ancestors of the Puffins were

Carroll Islet.

Figure 4



Tufted Puffin (*Lunda cirrhata*). A few guards brave enough to remain within twenty feet of the camera-man.

strongly marked, and they were therefore probably ledge nesters, as the Murres are still.

While these birds seem to fly readily once they have vaulted out over the ocean, it is clear that their short wings do not suffice to carry them upward directly to their nesting burrows. They get up from the sea rather clumsily and circle about on

rapidly vibrating wings, gradually ascending until on a plane above the nest burrow, when they either circle near it if any disturbance has been the cause of their departure, or drop down upon the mouth of the burrow with a thud. In their

Carroll Islet.

Figure 5



Tufted Puffin (*Lunda cirrhata*). Mouths  
of nest burrows, on a steep slope.

circles near the surface of the island the legs are held stiffly out ready for alighting. Once perched they stand at attention for some time before diving headlong into the burrow. The portrait in figure 2 was taken from the cover of bushes about four feet from a nest burrow on the instant after the bird had turned its head in response to a slight noise made for the pur-

pose, and less than two seconds after it had plumped down upon the mouth of the burrow. The next second he was gone, frightened by the snapping of the shutter. He circled back to the vicinity of the nest six times before finally venturing to Carroll Islet.

Figure 6



Tufted Puffin (*Lunda cirrhata*). A nest and egg in a brush-nest.

main long enough for a shot, and had caused me to wait nearly an hour in a cramped position and be the target of a family of scolding Wrens. But the picture is worth it.

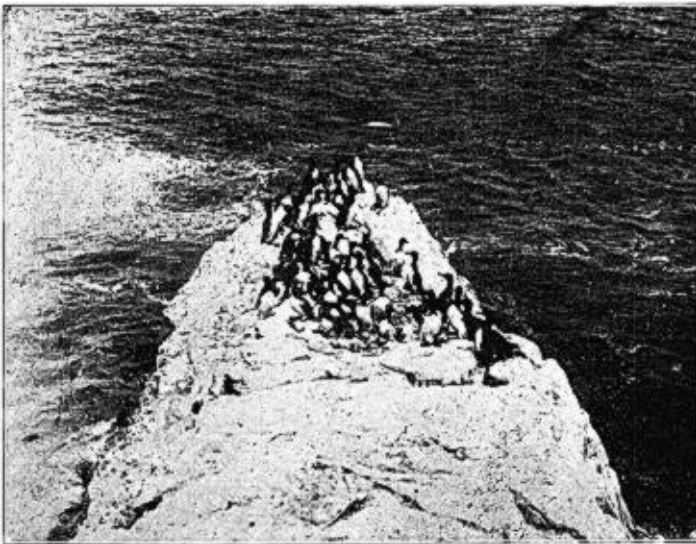
The Puffins seemed to be wholly silent as to voice. The startled bird made no exclamation even when leaving a nest burrow which one was probing into.

CALIFORNIA MURRE (*Uria troile californica*.)

Although probably fewer in numbers than the Puffins, the Murres were not less interesting. As before noted, they occupied two ledges, one jutting out landward as a narrow, naked shoulder some seventy-five feet from the water, the other a bordering ledge beneath the overhanging ocean side of the

Carroll Islet.

Figure 7



California Murre (*Uria troile californica*). The outer part of the shoulder ledge colony.

island. The latter was the larger colony and the more difficult of approach, and consequently was little studied. Some half-dozen birds were sitting upon their eggs between the nests of the White-crested Cormorant colony at the base of the cliff, and one sitting bird was discovered, with its egg, in a small cave half way up the Puffin slope. The accompanying pictures will convey a better impression of the smaller of these colonies than any word picture. However, it must be understood that the picture shows less than a third of the birds which were crowded upon this shoulder of rock when the birds



were undisturbed. At our approach, even when many yards distant, they spilled off the sides of the rocks like a cataract.

In figure 9 one bird may be seen about to assume the incubating posture. The egg is resting upon the ends of the toes. The bird will straighten up, fluff the feathers of the underparts

Carroll Islet.

Figure 8



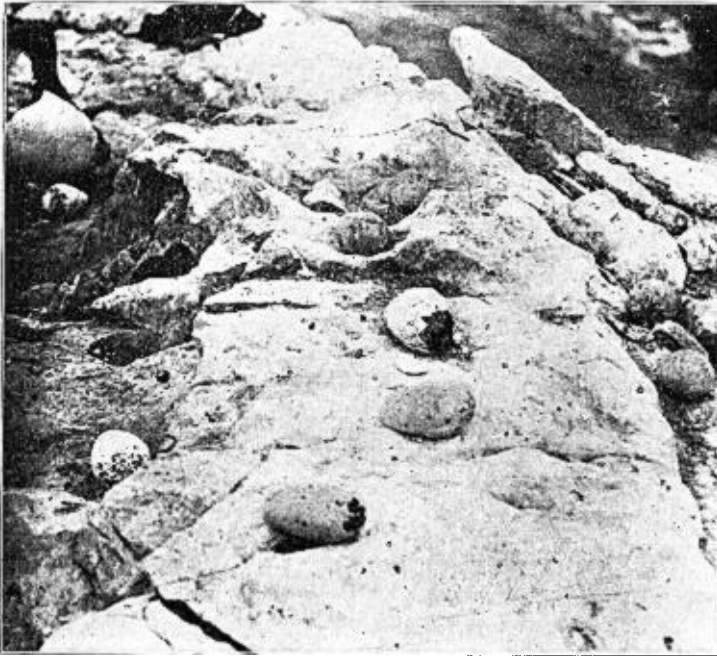
California Murre (*Uria troile californica*).  
Birds at three feet.

out, then settle down with the egg completely hidden beneath the feathers and its ends resting securely upon the bird's feet. If the bird is so much startled that it takes wing suddenly the egg is set to rolling and may roll off from the rock into the ocean.

In figure 8 one bird may be seen with its mouth stretched wide open and the bill pointing straight up. The bird is uttering a curious call, to which none of the other birds give the least attention. The call seems to be a purely personal matter, and may be variously interpreted.

The eggs are beautiful when freshly laid, but very soon become begrimed beyond description and recognition. The shades of ground color range from nearly pure white to a deep sea green, and the markings vary from scattering to dense, Carroll Islet.

Figure 9



California Murre (*Uria troile californica*). A chick almost hatched in the center of the picture. It is backing out of the large end of the egg, where the shell has been broken off.

and from spots and blotches to irregular lines. The color of the markings range from a nearly black brown to reddish. Of course the pigment is melanin and the dark markings are thick masses of it, while the light markings represent a thin film of it. The eggs are enormous for the size of the bird, and represent the sole reproductive effort for the year.

In figure 9 one black downy chick one-day old may be seen,

and another chick vigorously struggling to free himself from the shell, the large end of which he has forced off. His back was toward the camera.

No nest material is used, and, of course, none is needed. When the bird must leave the egg to secure food it is left on the bare rock, and at the mercy of wind and flying enemy. But eggs several days old are so befouled with grime and lime that they are not easily distinguished from the lime-covered rock upon which they rest. One wonders if even the fall rains and winter storms *could* wash those rocks clean! The stench was "quite some."

For all of the crowding, or because of it, there was little quarreling among the Murres, but there seemed to be considerable conversation at all times. They were packed so tightly together that late arriving birds found difficulty in wedging down to reach the rock surface. In approaching the rock they usually flew somewhat higher than its surface and fluttered down, landing heavily.

BAIRD CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus resplendens.*)

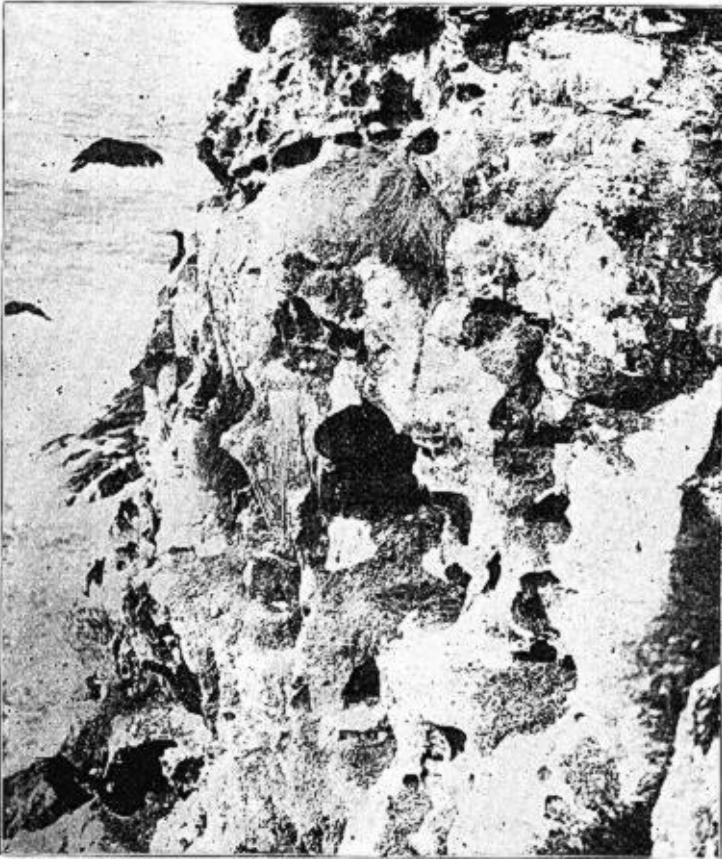
The nesting places of this Cormorant were small ledges or grottoes in precipices. Therefore the most of them were nesting on the ocean side of the island, and at various elevations. Nests were usually placed not nearer together than several feet, possibly because of the character of the rock face. The birds were uniformly more timid than the White-crested. Their single bark-like cry was not often heard, even when they were disturbed or frightened.

None of the nests examined contained sticks, but were wholly composed of dry grass, with occasionally a few feathers in the lining. All of the nest except the outside was clean, but the outside was characteristically covered with lime, and the rocks below the nest for many feet were white with the same substance. In fact, the nesting places of these birds could be discerned at considerable distances by the white streaking of the dark gray rocks. All along the coast, when we approached the rocky shores evidences of these birds were scattered along the rocks.

The two white patches each side of the rump make a strong and unmistakable field mark, as these birds hurry away from their nests or fly about. They seem to be a little smaller and

Carroll Islet.

Figure 10



**Haird Cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus resplendens*).  
A colony of nests.

rather more slender than the other two species inhabiting this region. The eggs are noticeably smaller and more slender, having a strong tendency to be nearly equal ended.

Carroll Islet.

Figure 11



Baird Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus resplendens*).  
Nest and eggs. A detail from the preceding figure.

BRANDT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*.)

Because these birds confined their nestings wholly to the "Pinnacle," an outlying rock some 200 feet from Carroll seaward, too steep for scaling, we could study them only with binoculars. Their nests seemed to be confined largely to the top of this rock, and seemed to be made of grass, much like the nests of the last species, but placed on nearly flat surfaces.

The nests were closely grouped. Little could be learned of their habits.

The other breeding birds of Carroll Islet, besides Cassin Auklet, Kaeding Petrel, and Black Oystercatcher, already reported upon in connection with other islands, were: Peale Falcon (*Falco peregrinus pealei*), one pair and one young able to fly about readily; Rufus Hummingbird (*Selasphorus rufus*) one pair noted; Sooty Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca fuliginosa*), one nest containing four fresh eggs and at least one other pair; Rusty Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia morphna*), probably two or more pairs heard singing; Western Winter Wren (*Olbiorchilus hiemalis pacificus*), at least two pairs with their families of young able to fly; and Russet-backed Thrush (*Hylocichla ustulata*), birds heard singing, but the numbers not determined. An American Crossbill and an Audubon Warbler were also noted, but they seemed to be transient visitors. The Northwest Crow and the American Raven made regular excursions to the island for lunch, the latter infrequently.

There is thus seen to be packed into and upon this speck of rock out in the Pacific a wealth of bird life which could be hardly surpassed anywhere, both in numbers of individuals and in species. One longs to revisit a spot of such pleasant memories rather than venture into untried fields.