

AN INCIDENT CONCERNING THE PERUVIAN TORRENT DUCK

By STANTON PHILLIPS (Long Beach, California, U.S.A.)

A correct interpretation of the actions of any waterfowl as little known as the Peruvian Torrent Duck is difficult. This is particularly true when the bird involved demonstrates an apparently large variety of behaviour patterns. With this in mind I submit the following observation :—

It was originally my intention in going to Peru to capture and keep in captivity the Peruvian Torrent Duck. In pursuit of this end a group was formed in Lima consisting of Dr. Ortiz de la Puente, Director of the birds and mammals section of the Javier Prado Museum of Natural History ; Mr. Luis Riva, engineer and amateur ornithologist ; and myself.

Reaching Yacca, a hacienda at 2,500 metres on the Rio Canete, we established camp. The river was swollen as are most Andean streams during the month of January and, since this made the use of our nets impracticable, we contented ourselves with whatever observations were possible. Mr. Riva and I were walking on a small hill downstream when, at a distance of approximately 500 feet before us, we saw a mature drake poised motionless on a jutting midstream rock. We seated ourselves, focused binoculars, and waited. With great dignity it bowed deeply, at the same time pushing the tip of its tail upward to a height exceeding that of its vertically extended neck and head. The entire action appeared to be pendulum-like with the feet serving as inverted fulcrums. After each such four or five second performance, it would resume its usual stance which was marked only by an occasional turn of the head. It would then advance 6 to 12 inches and perform again. With about fifteen of these completed it had reached the end of the rock and abruptly flew cross-stream into the less torrential side waters. Here it disappeared.

Our temptation to believe that we were the objects of the display was somewhat dispelled when, after arriving within 50 feet of the rock, we discovered a mature female standing on a portion of the rock where our original point of observation made such discovery impossible. We observed her for about ten minutes and, although she could see our every movement, she gave no sign of fear. She finally and leisurely slipped into the water and floated downstream.

The stimulating agent for the drake's conduct could be anything, of course, including the aforementioned female, ourselves, a twig in the throat, or maybe another female. It was probably the latter.

THE AVICULTURAL MAGAZINE

BEING THE JOURNAL OF THE
AVICULTURAL SOCIETY AND
THE AVICULTURAL SOCIETY OF
AMERICA

EDITED BY
PHYLLIS BARCLAY-SMITH, F.Z.S.

VOL. LIX
JANUARY, 1953, to DECEMBER, 1953

HERTFORD
STEPHEN AUSTIN & SONS, LTD.

1953

AVICULTURAL MAGAZINE



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