

The Bird Page . . .

IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER VERGING ON EXTINCTION

BY ELLEN THORNE SMITH
ASSOCIATE, DIVISION OF BIRDS

Mr. Robert Burton of Chicago recently gave the Museum a pair of ivory-billed woodpeckers, a species probably extinct or on the verge of extinction in the United States. The separately mounted male and female are in excellent condition and were



IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

Specimen on exhibition in Hall 21. The species is in danger of becoming extinct.

shot by Mr. Burton's grandfather, Henry W. Burton, of Carlinville, Illinois. Mr. Burton used to hunt deer in the St. Francis River country of Arkansas, where he shot these birds about 1870 and had them mounted. They have been in the possession of the family since then, and Mr. Robert Burton, realizing their value and importance, decided that they should find permanent housing in Chicago Natural History Museum.

RIVER BOAT SOUVENIRS

It should be noted that in spite of name and color, the bills are not real ivory but are horn, a fact not generally realized. When the first Mississippi steamboats stopped for wood fuel, passengers paid 25 cents for two or three heads. In later years, mistaking the bills for genuine ivory, as much as five dollars for a bird's bill changed hands, a goodly sum for those days.

An early reference to the ivory-billed woodpecker was made in 1731 by Mark Catesby, who says that their bills were much prized by Indians, who made crowns of them, points outward, for their chiefs and great warriors. "Northern Indians, having none, purchased them from southern Indians for 2 and sometimes 3 buckskins for each bill." Belts of chiefs were also closely

ornamented with both crests and bills of the bird, whose dried head was supposed to give to an Indian the woodpecker's power of seeking out and capturing prey and of cutting a big hole in its enemy. A calumet (peace pipe) decorated with six or seven ivory bills is in the near-by Public Museum of Milwaukee.

The ivory-billed woodpecker is (or was) a bird of the cypress swamps and moss-hung oak and sweet-gum forests of the South. In former times it was found throughout the Gulf states and as far north as North Carolina and up the Mississippi Valley to southern Ohio and Illinois, where Audubon saw it in 1831. He nicknamed it "Van Dyke" because of its neat, dignified black-and-white plumage and its red crest. The female's crest is entirely black.

As civilization spread and the roadless wilderness diminished, the ivory-billed woodpecker became more and more rare, until in 1926 it was believed to be extinct in the United States. A larger species exists in Mexico and a smaller one in Cuba, both also becoming increasingly rare. However, in 1930-32, a few ivory-bills were found in South Carolina, southern Florida, and central Louisiana, where detailed studies were made of the bird and its habits. The last authentic pair disappeared from the Singer Logging Tract of Louisiana in 1942, and all subsequent reports of ivory-bills, when followed up, have proved to be mistaken ones based on the pileated woodpecker. The pileated woodpecker, although a large bird, is 3 or 4 inches smaller than the ivory-bill and is fairly common in large forests in many parts of the United States. One notable difference is the presence of a distinctive large white back-patch in the ivory-billed woodpecker.

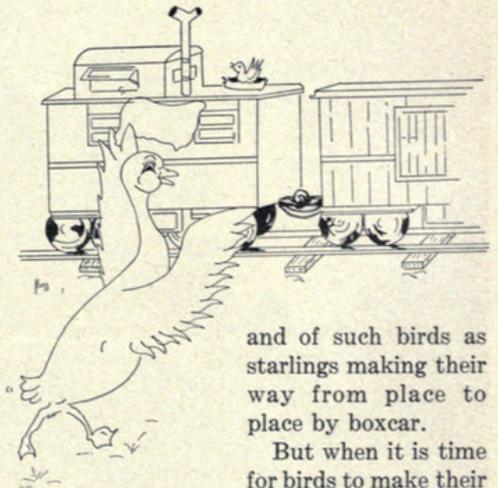
A clue to the disappearance of the ivory-billed woodpecker may be found in its feeding habits. It lives almost entirely on the borers and beetle larvae that abound between the bark and the sapwood of newly dead trees. Its large pointed bill is really a chisel for stripping off the bark, so that its long extending tongue can reach and spear the borers. Trees long dead and even some living trees have borers inside the sapwood and heartwood, where they are dug out by the pileated woodpecker but seldom by the ivory-bill. Recently dead trees in abundance are found only in rare spots, such as in the wake of hurricanes or on burnt-over land and also on the site of logging operations. The ivory-billed wood-

pecker is a strong flier, traveling in pairs (they mate for life) from one forest catastrophe to another. In such places it strips the bark completely from a recently dead tree, leaving it in piles around the base of the tree. With the completion of logging operations in many southern areas, the enormous amount of food required each day by this big bird is so reduced that it is probably extinct now in the United States, except possibly for a few stray individuals.

TRAVELING BIRD'S NESTS

BY AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

IN SPRING and fall many of our birds make long journeys under their own power, some of the most publicized being the migration of the Arctic tern, a bird that may spend the northern summer north of the Arctic Circle and, before returning there next season, may have visited south of the Antarctic Circle. The golden plover that makes a non-stop flight to Hawaii is another famous traveler, and many of our smaller song birds are no mean travelers either. The barn swallow that nests about an Illinois farm in the summer may spend the winter in Argentina. The tiny hummingbird's feat of crossing the Gulf of Mexico non-stop is worthy of mention, too. Such travels have become commonplace through familiarity. We have come to accept even the possibility of trans-Atlantic passages of occasional small passerers, helped by trans-Atlantic vessels,



Cartoon by Emily Huss

and of such birds as starlings making their way from place to place by boxcar.

But when it is time for birds to make their nests and rear their family we expect them to give up their traveling for a time and to settle down in one place. We expect, with our song birds, to have the male arrive first, pick out a territory, and announce to his species that other males are to keep out and that a mate is welcome. The female arrives and chooses her mate or his territory, and a nesting ensues. Many species defend the area around the nest against others of their kind. So it comes as a surprise to find nests built in such a situation that they are not stationary but move back and forth, along with part of their environment.

PLEASE NOTIFY MUSEUM IF YOU GO AWAY

Members going away during the summer may have Museum matter sent to their temporary addresses.

Tree swallows nest on the ferryboats that ply between Ogdensburg, New York, and Prescott, Ontario, across the St. Lawrence River where it is more than a mile wide. The nests are tucked into suitable openings on the ferries, and the frequent trips back and forth across this mile of water and the docking at different piers do not seem to disturb the birds. They gather their nesting material of feathers and straws and leaves from either shore, and when the young are being fed, insects may be gathered about the Canadian or the United States shore, depending on where the ferryboat is docked.

Barn swallows have been noted nesting on railway trains that run across the two-mile portage between Atlin Lake and Carcross on Lake Marsh (in Yukon Territory). In the summer the train makes the trip almost daily, and for many years a pair, or a succession of pairs, has made its nest and raised its young in one of the open baggage cars. Members of the train crew have taken an interest in the birds and put up a cigar box for a safe place for their nest. Here the family seems to prosper, undisturbed by the proximity of people and baggage and the clatter as well as the movement of the train.

STAFF NOTES

Colonel Clifford C. Gregg, Director of the Museum, has been elected a member of the Council of the American Association of Museums. The Council is the governing board of the association. . . . Dr. Paul S. Martin, Chief Curator of Anthropology, Dr. Alexander Spoehr, Curator of Oceanic Ethnology, Mr. George I. Quimby, Curator of Exhibits, Mr. John B. Rinaldo, Assistant in Archaeology, and Miss Elaine Bluhm of the anthropological staff attended the annual meetings of the Society for American Archaeologists and of the Central States Branch of the American Anthropological Association held jointly at Indiana University in Bloomington, May 13-14. Mr. Quimby was elected president of the second-named group. Dr. Martin was elected a member of the Executive Committee of the archaeological society. Dr. Spoehr presented a paper on "Kinship Types in Micronesia." . . . Chief Curator Martin will lecture before the School of American Research in the Museum of New Mexico at Santa Fe on June 10. He will tell the results of the Museum's Southwest Archaeological Expeditions and present a motion picture of the "dig." . . . Mr. Donald Collier, Curator of South American Ethnology and Archaeology, attended the annual meeting of the Division of Anthropology and Psychology of the National Research Council in Washington, D.C., May 13-14. . . . Mrs. Meta P. Howell, Museum Librarian, was a speaker before the

Librarians' Section of the meeting of the American Association of Museums held at the Oriental Institute in Chicago last month. Her subject was "Exchanges of Publications." . . . Miss Miriam Wood, Chief of the Raymond Foundation, spoke on "Teaching Botany to Children" before the Children's Museum Section at the annual meeting of the American Museums Association held in the lecture hall of this Museum May 20. . . . Mr. Karl P. Schmidt, Chief Curator of Zoology, was chairman of the organization meeting of the Committee for Research of the Chicago Zoological Society, held in the Museum recently. Dr. Alfred E. Emerson, of the University of Chicago, who is a Research Associate in Insects at the Museum, was one of those present together with Mr. Clay Judson, Mr. Robert Bean, Director of the Chicago Zoological Society, and Prof. Smith Freeman, of Northwestern University. . . . Mr. Loren P. Woods, Curator of Fishes, gave a lecture for the Department of Zoology at the University of Illinois recently.

Museum Officials' Meetings

The Children's Museums Committee for the United States of the International Council of Museums, a division of the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO), held a meeting, attended by delegates from many cities, at Chicago Natural History Museum on May 18.

The May 20 sessions of the American Association of Museums meeting (May 19-21) were held at this Museum.

Noted Entomologists Here

Dr. Elwood C. Zimmerman, Associate Entomologist, Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, and Curator of Entomology, Bernice P. Bishop Museum at Honolulu, spent a day at the Museum in May. Dr. Zimmerman is en route to the British Museum (Natural History) to complete work on butterflies, moths, and nerve-winged insects of Hawaii.

Other distinguished entomologists who visited the Museum last month were Dr. Joseph C. Bequaert, Curator of Insects, Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College, and Dr. Cornelius B. Philip, Senior Entomologist, Microbiological Institute, Rocky Mountain Laboratory, Hamilton, Montana.

The bower-birds, rather close relatives of the gorgeous birds of paradise, go in for psychology in their courtship. Instead of depending on his plumage, the male builds an elaborate bower and dances on its decorated platform to charm his bride (see Case 19 in Stanley Field Hall).

LECTURE TOURS IN JUNE, DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAYS

Tours of exhibits, under the guidance of staff lecturers, are conducted every afternoon at 2 o'clock, except Sundays and certain holidays. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, general tours are given covering all departments. Special subjects are offered on Wednesdays and Fridays; a schedule of these follows:

Wed., June 1—Races of Mankind (*Lorain Farmer*).

Fri., June 3—The Adventures of Carl Akeley. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*June Buchwald*).

Wed., June 8—Defense Weapons of Animals (*Jane Sharpe*).

Fri., June 10—Plants and Animals of Illinois. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Marie Svoboda*).

Wed., June 15—The Land of the Mummies (*June Buchwald*).

Fri., June 17—Summer Hobbies—Exploring the Out-of-Doors. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Miriam Wood*).

Wed., June 22—Toys (*Harriet Smith*).

Fri., June 24—Parade of the Insects. Illustrated introduction in Meeting Room (*Lorain Farmer*).

Wed., June 29—Our Daily Bread—Plants of Economic Importance (*Marie Svoboda*).

Persons wishing to participate should apply at North Entrance. Tours are free. By pre-arrangement, special tours are available to groups.

NEW MEMBERS

(April 16 to May 14)

Associate Members

Walter S. Baltis, Dr. John A. Bigler, N. Newton Inlander, Robert J. Koch, A. W. Lavers, Richard M. Loewenstein, A. E. Meyerhoff, Vincent P. Reilly, Mrs. Barrett Scudder.

Annual Members

Otto Bissel, Morton Bodfish, Harold Brady, A. D. Bruce, Harley N. Bruce, C. L. Casey, Claude T. Clark, Thomas J. Corcoran, Dave Edelson, Miss Frances C. English, Sheridan E. Farin, Sidney M. Fields, James H. Finlay, C. P. Fisher, Arthur H. Hagg, Herbert Harig, LeRoy B. Herbst, Mrs. George P. Hollingbery, Dr. Paul Joseph, Mrs. Marion O. Kane, Stanley B. Levi, Carl S. Lloyd, Philip Lyons, Kenneth McBurney, Rev. Thomas J. Megahey, Thomas G. Murdough, Edwin A. Murray, George B. Pletsch, William G. Rambeau, H. T. Riedeman, Harlow P. Roberts, Alan S. Robinson, Hugo R. Scala, Werner W. Schroeder, Dr. Steven P. Schwartz, Ross D. Siragusa, Raymond A. Smerge, Mrs. Francis R. Stanton, William Scott Stewart, Edward F. Toepper, Ralph R. Trimarco, C. A. Wells, Preston Zimmerman.



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1949. "Traveling Bird's Nests." *Bulletin* 20(6), 4-5.

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