

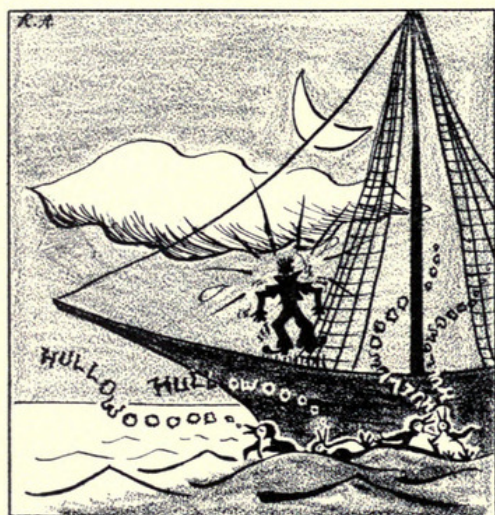
COMMUNITY SINGING BY BIRD CHOIRS

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CHIEF CURATOR OF ZOOLOGY

THE OTHER DAY a friend of mine was telling of the community singing that was popular before the days of radio and television. For a time, years ago, he had eked out a meager salary with a pittance earned by leading the singing in a mid-western village. For an hour in the evening, by exhortation and example in the village park, he had the villagers singing. I thought as I listened, "Why, that's not too unlike what some birds do."

The voice of the greater shearwater is used in a communal courtship. The sound is "Ma-ma-ma..." or "Ha-ha-ha..." It is described by the few who have heard it as having a peculiar, strident, breathless quality with an effect, when many birds perform at once, of "screaming cacophony." Nevertheless, it is music to shearwater ears, and it is actually their song.

These far-ranging sea birds, smaller relatives of the albatross, roam over the whole



Atlantic from Cape Horn to South Africa and north to Newfoundland and Norway. But when it is time for nesting they all return to the tiny, lonely Tristan da Cunha Islands in mid-South Atlantic, their only breeding grounds. Here they go ashore and form dense colonies. M. K. Rowan, stationed on Tristan, studied them in detail.

HUNDREDS JOIN IN

He found, in the close-packed colonies, when one pair of birds started to sing, others joined in at once until the voices of hundreds of birds were swelling the strident din. Then just as suddenly they stopped and all was quiet for a time. It was, he writes, especially impressive at night when in the darkness the "enormous volume of sound ebbs and flows," coming now from one direction, now from another.

The jackass penguin gets its name from the likeness of its melancholy call to the bray of the donkey. On the Falkland

Islands, near the southern tip of South America, A. F. Cobb writes that when one of these penguins starts its doleful bray others answer until the whole district is moaning in chorus. Sometimes the birds call on land, sometimes when they are at sea. Possibly, Cobb suggests, the reported wails of ghosts of drowned sailors were in reality the weebegone "hulloow's" of jackass penguins.

A concert of bird voices can travel far, like a wave through the West African forests, as Harry A. Beatty found in Liberia when he was collecting birds for Chicago Natural History Museum. Especially is this true of the plantain eater, a large greenish relative of the cuckoos, which lives there. Beatty writes me that when an impulsive bird strikes the first clarion note, at once others take it up. The chorus swells. The first birds soon stop but others, farther off, are taking it up, and long after the first birds are quiet you can hear birds in the far distance. Possibly the notes are relayed a long distance.

It is not always the call of one of their own kind that sets off a bird chorus, as E. A. Preble found when he was traveling on the barrens east of Hudson Bay. The arctic loon was noisy there. It is noted for its peculiar loud, weird, and prolonged shrill scream. A lone bird, it is said, may howl like a fiend for up to a half-hour at a time, and a howl of a timber wolf or some other sound may set off a chorus of the wild cries.

STAFF NOTES

George I. Quimby, Curator of North American Archaeology and Ethnology, attended a field meeting of the Friends of the Pleistocene in northern Michigan last month. The organization is composed of glacial geologists, soil scientists, archaeologists, foresters, botanists, and zoologists. On this trip the group examined glacial and late glacial phenomena between Traverse City and the Straits of Mackinac.... George Langford, Curator of Fossil Plants, and Orville L. Gilpin, Chief Preparator of Fossils, collected specimens of fossil plants during a recent field trip to Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Dr. Rainer Zangerl, Curator of Fossil Reptiles, Dr. Eugene S. Richardson, Jr., Curator of Fossil Invertebrates, Dr. Robert H. Denison, Curator of Fossil Fishes, and Preparator Gilpin were interviewed about dinosaurs on television over WTTW.... Henry S. Dybas, Associate Curator of Insects, recently lectured on the seventeen-year cicada before the Chicago Entomological Society and the Barrington Natural History Society. He lectured on other subjects for the Department of Zoology of the University of Chicago.

LAPIDARIES DISPLAY ART AT MUSEUM IN JUNE

AN ART practiced by a comparatively small number of people the world over and by few amateurs will be the subject of a special exhibit during June in Stanley Field Hall at Chicago Natural History Museum. This is the lapidary's art—the cutting and polishing of gems and the creation of jewelry.

The Chicago Lapidary Club is the nucleus in the Chicago area of a small but devoted band of "rockhounds," as they call themselves, who range abroad in the field to collect gem material for their creative work. For the sixth successive year, the lapidary club will hold its Annual Amateur Handcrafted Gem and Jewelry Competitive Exhibition at the Museum. Formal presentations of awards were made at the Hamilton Park Field House during a three-day preview in May.

All those participating in the contest live in Chicago and suburbs within a 50-mile radius of the city. Included are not only members of the Chicago Lapidary Club but also other amateur lapidary and jewelry craftsmen of the area. Many of the contestants have received instruction through facilities offered by the Chicago Park District in the field houses maintained in small parks in many parts of the city and have done much of their work there. Those entrants in the contest who offer jewelry creations not only must cut their gems but also must prepare the gold and silver mountings and carry out the design-work.

Those who competed and whose creations were judged worthy of exhibition are divided into two classifications—novices and advanced workers. In each classification the exhibits are divided into ten specialized craft divisions: cabochon-cut individual gems, faceted individual gems, collections of specific gems, general gem collections, individual jewelry, jewelry sets, special pieces, collections of polished specimens or slabs, enameled jewelry, and enameled special pieces. Trophy cups, medals, and ribbons have been awarded in each division.

In addition to the individual awards, there are three special trophies for top winners. One is the Dalzell Trophy, awarded to the best of show. Another is the Presidents' Trophy, which goes to the outstanding first-prize winner among lapidary exhibits. Third is the Councilmen's Trophy, awarded to the outstanding jewelry.

Daily Guide-Lectures

Free guide-lecture tours are offered daily except Sundays under the title "Highlights of the Exhibits." These tours are designed to give a general idea of the entire Museum and its scope of activities. They begin at 2 P.M. on Monday through Friday and at 2:30 P.M. on Saturday.



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1956. "Community Singing by Bird Choirs." *Bulletin* 27(6), 7-7.

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