

## NESTLING TO NUISANCE —BIRDS MAKE NEWS

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SOME TIME AGO I made a "Bookish Christmas Bird Census" (BULLETIN, Feb., 1956), an attempt to evaluate people's interest in birds. My material was supplied by the magazines and papers on my coffee table one evening just before Christmas. My results, which yielded 27 birds, were inconclusive. Since then I have made another survey, more restricted in area but covering more time.

I have on my desk 250 newspaper clippings from the four Chicago dailies, a two-year harvest gleaned in a desultory manner.



A survey of them gives gratifying evidence that today people are indeed bird-conscious. The amount of bird material presented is amazing. Every two or three days an item appears (exclusive of the nature columns and the material in the Sunday supplements and the sporting pages). They range in length from a few lines to a half-column or more. Many are illustrated. The subject matter covers a wide variety of bird news, and 130 kinds of birds are mentioned. The public reached by these stories is the combined daily circulation of the four papers, totaling more than 2,500,000. Such an audience dwarfs into insignificance the 3,000 specialized readers of the quarterly bird journal, *The Auk*, and the 30,000 readers of *Audubon Magazine*, the popular nature periodical.

Ornithology would seem to have achieved a signal success in making birds and their ways familiar to the man in the street; in making its findings the material of everyday reading and conversations; in making the general public aware of birds as part of its environment; and in putting bird-lore in the public's domain. This is one of the ultimate goals of any science. What better measure of this success than seeing what the daily press presents to its urban readers?

### LOCAL STORIES PREDOMINATE

As one would expect, almost half the bird news is local. People like best to read about themselves, and after that, about their neighbors. Thus it is no surprise to find that the

pigeon gets the most attention. It feeds in city streets, eats peanuts on elevated railway stations, and perches on statues in city parks. The young hatch on window ledges; a nest is in too dangerous a place for a boy to climb; there are too many pigeons, so professional trappers are hired; they race; a military pigeon, AWOL, is recovered; and a wanderer comes aboard a ship at sea and is rescued. One newspaper call that took a photographer to record a "pheasant" on a city roof resulted in a photograph of a pigeon, but this in itself made a story.

The robin, best known and best liked by city people, is a runner-up of the pigeon for attention, but its coverage is different. The robin has troubles in the spring when snow covers the ground; it drops eggs on lawns; young birds fall out of the nest and are hand raised, and then, tame, they will not leave on migrations.

People like to read about far places and strange birds, and they like to look at their photos. We have stories of such exotics as penguins in Antarctica, kookaburras from Australia, and sacred cranes from Japan. Photogenic subjects include also flamingoes; a closeup of an owl's eyes; and an adjutant stork from India, apparently deeply sunk in thought. Local birds are also photogenic: we have a Japanese-looking heron in a local pond; local purple martins, ready to migrate, lined up on telephone wires; and ducks, in flight, in an ice-rimmed pond, or standing on the ice.

Visiting personalities from the country, especially when they are photogenic, get space. They range from night herons on city roofs, and owls in trees in city yards and down chimneys, to a woodcock that came in through an office window.

### FOREIGN RELATIONS

Foreign visitors have their place, too. Some came under their own power, like the African cattle egret and the European redshank. New arrivals at the zoo might be just a list of strange names if it were not for the thumbnail sketches of their habits or their appearance that help to make them entities, as the Malee fowl of Australia that buries its eggs in an earthen mound, and the Egyptian plover or crocodile bird, which, since Herodotus' time, has been reported to clean the teeth of crocodiles that open their mouths to allow the birds to perform this office. This report is now in disrepute.

Miscellaneous accounts of personalities range from the white storks of Europe to the California condors, the oil bird of caves in Peru, and crows that pull clothespins off the line and let the wash drop.

Much current news has to do with disasters and mishaps. Birds share in these. An oil slick appeared on Lake Michigan and distressed ducks and grebes, coated with oil, began to drift ashore daily. This made news for days. Another feature story related the

poisoning of migratory shore birds on an industrial-waste dump.

Lesser troubles found their place, too: sparrows huddled under the eaves out of the icy rain; an Egyptian goose in a park was shot with an arrow; 150 baby chicks were victims of a traffic accident, and a duck was killed by hailstones.

### CASES FOR THE POLICE

Police stations and police court news had their bird incidents: a swan disrupted traffic at a busy intersection and went to a police station cell; a lost wren came by itself to the station and liked it so much that it stayed four days; Joliet police procedure in handling the case of a woman bitten by a rooster.

Petty "crime" did not always reach the police court. An English crow that "stole" 800 golf balls was eliminated. In Ontario a Canada jay stole a workman's glasses when he laid them aside for a moment.

To round out the extent of the coverage, I will mention just a few of the many subjects: parakeets and myna birds figuring in divorce court cases; pet parakeets turning up in all sorts of strange places, nesting in vacuum cleaners, getting lost, being given courses at the local YMCA for \$6 per series; Easter chicks dyed pink not to be used as playthings; the fate of abandoned nestlings; and a 21-year-old tanager.

That young things are appealing is abundantly demonstrated. There are photographs of young pigeons hatched in a March snowstorm; a truck driver trying to hatch a robin's egg; birds' nests on fire escapes, on electric lights, on a mop, and in traffic lights; young mallards in city parks; sparrows' nests in traffic lights and on a school bus in use; and a doves' nest that delayed a construction job.

### MANY OTHER ASPECTS

There are stories on conservation; on sparrows suffering when automobiles replaced horses; on bird behavior and its instinctive-psychological aspects; on bird migration; on woodpeckers damaging buildings and insurance against it; city starlings' roosts disturbing citizens, and nesting albatrosses disrupting airplane service on a Pacific island; Dutch elm disease and its treatment killing birds; live bird trade in India; and birds killed at airport ceilometers.

The general impression one gets is that city people are interested in birds. These clippings represent real happenings. The standard of accuracy in all these accounts is high. The reporters knew what they were writing about, or consulted those who did (often they called the Museum). The educational, conservational, and economic importance or furthering-of-science aspects of birds are of interest only as they are news. The stories are not aimed at the hobbyist or the bird-lover who has his special column. Birds are reported as interest-



ing beings: their birth, life, and death. Silly and tragic things happen to them. They get mixed up with the police, are lauded, or joked about; their private lives, their comings and goings, and how they affect the community in which they live are all reported as they happen. We can hardly say that birds are on the way to becoming citizens, but the citizens are certainly becoming aware of them. As far as birds are concerned, the newspaper reading public has a chance to be biologically literate.

## FOSSIL COLLECTORS COMB WYOMING AREA

For the third successive season, a paleontological expedition is working in the upper and lower formations of the Washakie Basin in Wyoming. Leader of the expedition is William D. Turnbull, Assistant Curator of Fossil Mammals. He is accompanied by David Collier, a volunteer assistant.

Objective is the collection of more fossil mammals of the middle Eocene epoch (about 50 to 45 million years ago). The 1956 and 1957 expeditions to the Washakie, a circular area of about 400 square miles, were highly successful, and the prospects of the present excavations to obtain additional species of the ancient fauna are promising. It is expected that fossil reptiles, fishes and other animals, as well as mammals, will be obtained.

## Two More Free Movie Shows Offered for Children

The final two programs in the Raymond Foundation's free summer series for children will be given on the first two Thursday mornings in August. There will be two showings of each program, the first at 10 A.M., and the second at 11 or 11:15 as per schedule below. No tickets are required. Children are invited to come alone, accompanied by parents or other adults, or in organized groups. Following are the dates and titles:

### August 7—A TRIP TO THE MOON

(for older children)

(10 and 11:15 a.m.)

Also a cartoon

### August 14—VACATION SPECIAL

(10 and 11 a.m.)

Vacation fun in your own backyard and in the wilderness

Also a cartoon

## Albinism Thwarted

A robin that was partly albinistic, with underparts mostly white, mated with a normal bird, and raised two broods of normal young. It then moulted into a plumage that was nearly normal, according to a report from Salt Lake City.

—Condor

# PRE-GUTENBERG PRINTING FOUND IN MEXICO

By ALFRED LEE ROWELL

DIORAMIST, DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

A RECENTLY INSTALLED EXHIBIT in Hall 8 (Ancient and Modern Indians of Mexico and Central America) deals with the Totonac people who lived in the central Veracruz region of Mexico from A.D. 900 to 1500. This exhibit includes several stamps made of pottery clay, fired like any other piece of pottery, that were used for printing designs on fabrics or on the human body.

These stamps, essentially devices for saving labor and time, are based on the same principle as all printing since and even before the time of Gutenberg. Our textile industry also uses the same principle in producing millions of yards of printed fabrics. A typewriter is really a highly efficient machine for applying small stamps to a suitable surface.

## NOTEWORTHY IN DESIGN

These Totonac stamps have interesting, well-designed faces, probably with symbolic or mystical meanings that we do not comprehend because we do not have a complete understanding of the mental and spiritual background of the people. Two of the stamps, dating from about the 12th century, were selected to show their imprint as it would be made in actual use. One of these has a strong, bold design of heavy black lines, showing the traditional feathered serpent. The other, which is smaller, with a more complicated design of lighter lines, shows the wide-open jaws of a feathered serpent and a monkey. Both are highly stylized. The design of the monkey is unusually well conceived and gives a better expression of the nature and character of the subject than a photographically realistic drawing. It compares favorably with the best of our present-day designing.

Another interesting feature of these stamps is their method of manufacture, especially the smaller one, as we learned in making plastic reproductions of them. These reproductions were made to avoid discoloring the originals in the printing process. We first made a squeeze, or impression, in Duron plastic, hardening it by baking it in place on the stamp at a temperature of 300° F. for about one hour. This provided a mold, or matrix, for casting a replica of the original stamp by pressing Duron into it and baking it in place. A dusting of talc acted as a separator. The cast replicas were used for making the prints shown in the exhibit.

It was immediately apparent from the Duron impression of the smaller stamp that it had been made by squeezing moist clay into a mold, or matrix, that had been formed by pressing the black parts of the design into moist clay, evidenced by the pushing up of the material. After this mold for making stamps was dried and probably fired, it could then be used for turning out an unlimited

number of stamps in a primitive mass-production or for making replacements for broken stamps. The slabs of moist clay bearing the design could be bent into concave or convex forms, as might be required for printing on various surfaces. It is prob-



POTTERY STAMP FOR PRINTING

Used by early Totonac tribesmen of Mexico for transferring design to fabric and sometimes to their own skin. The stamp is about three inches long.

able that the concave form shown in the exhibit may have been used for printing a fabric stretched across the thigh of the user or for printing on the skin of arms or legs.

## LABOR-SAVING METHOD

This method of making the stamp was an example of labor-saving practicality, since it is easier to press a line into clay than it is to



IMPRESSION OF STAMP

The design imprinted on cloth shows a monkey (at right) and the gaping jaws of a serpent (left).

build up a line, but there was further evidence of the same ingenuity. The small S-shaped elements in the border of the design had been pressed into the clay of the matrix by using a small stamp or die. There is no way of knowing how this die was made—whether it was carved from wood or other material or made of clay and fired.

Thus it is clear from these 800-year-old stamps that Totonac craftsmen were not lacking in creative ingenuity and that they had worked out labor-saving methods for accomplishing their purposes.

The world's largest model of the moon is exhibited in Hall 35.





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