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WILD LIFE
IN THE
FALKLAND ISLANDS
ARTHUR F. COPE, B.A.

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THE photographs which follow come from
a very out-of-the-way portion of the
British Empire and should therefore have
uncommon interest for naturalists.

The publishers' thanks are due to Mr.
Chubb, of the British Museum, who kindly
checked the Latin nomenclature and added
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EIER DES WEISSFUSSAUSTERNFISCHERS

BLACK AND WHITE OYSTER-CATCHERS FEEDING HUITRIERS A PIEDS BLANCS MANGEANT
WISSELSCHAUWIEFISCHER EUTTEREND

Some Notes on the Creatures

OF WHICH

PHOTOGRAPHS APPEAR IN
THE FOREGOING PAGES. .

BY

ARTHUR F. COBB, B.A. (Oxon.)

Southern Sea Elephant or Elephant Seal (*Macrorhinus leoninus*). Frontispiece. These unwieldy creatures are not often seen in the Falkland Islands. Occasionally they have ventured up near one of the settlements when sick or wounded, as in the case of the specimen here photographed. He came into Darwin Harbour, past the houses, even going under a bridge into the shallow upper bay, causing great excitement among the people. This bull measured eighteen feet in length and about eleven feet in girth. The cows are usually about half the size of the bulls. The name of "Elephant" was given to them partly on account of their huge proportions, partly from their curious upper lip, which falls forward, somewhat resembling a short trunk.

Sea Lion or Hair Seal (*Otaria jubata*). Pages 6-8. Is very plentiful in some parts of the Falkland Group, especially on the outlying and unfrequented smaller islands. The photographs on pages 6-8 are of a big Sea Lion with his two wives or "Clapmatches" which were lying asleep on land, several hundred yards from the sea. This formidable beast objected very strongly to their being photographed. He would take a few steps in the direction of the camera, then return to his place beside them, opening his cavernous mouth and roaring loudly. Single Sea Lions on the tussac islands rarely stay to be photographed, but hurry into the sea without turning to left or right. As will be seen in the pictures, the female is much smaller than the male. It is said that the pups are so fat, when first taking to the water, that ballast in the form of stones is given them by their parents to keep them down.

Octopus (*Polypus sp. inc.*). Page 9. The photograph on page 9 is of an Octopus lying dead on the beach, being the only specimen the writer has ever seen in the islands.

Gentoo Penguin (*Pygoscelis papua*). Pages 10-15. The Gentoo Penguin builds in large rookeries, either on land in grass and diddle-dee, or on sand beaches where the nests are made of stones and bones, twigs of the diddle-dee and scraps of kelp. Unlike the Jackass Penguins (page 16) the Gentoos do not all migrate in the winter, though they are seen in smaller numbers then than in the summer months. When approached they generally run down to the sea, leaving their nests, with the little ones huddled up together, to take care of themselves. The adult birds are blue-black on the back, neck and throat, otherwise white, with a small white patch above and behind the eye. They look most comical when scurrying over the ground and sometimes trip on the soft peaty soil, a disaster that befell the gentleman on page 15, to the detriment of his beautiful snow-white waistcoat.

Jackass Penguin (*Spheniscus magellanicus*). Page 16. The Jackass Penguin breeds in many different parts of the islands. The birds return from their winter absence about the third week in September, and from that date to the middle of April, when they leave, one can hear their melancholy bray (from which they take their name of Jackass) on any calm night, sounding from the small tussac islands and shores where they make their underground homes. These burrows are usually close to the beach, and vary in depth according to the locality. In some the sitting birds are close to the entrance, while in others they are far back, only just visible twisting their heads quickly from side to side. They lay two eggs in October, these do not remain white very long but get stained and dirty, as the Jackasses are not over particular about having their homes well drained and do not possess doormats. They scramble in and out over the soft ground in all weathers, and often a driving rain makes their home a muddy swamp. They walk about in couples on the beach, but are shy, and hurry into the sea if surprised when too far from their burrows to take refuge in them. For this reason a photograph of a living specimen is hard to get.

King Penguin (*Aptenodytes patagonica*). Pages 17-19. The King Penguin is second in size only to the Emperor Penguin, and is a rare bird in the Falkland Islands. A few specimens have at different times been kept in captivity as pets, those shown on pages 17-19 being of this number. Standing side by side they make a very handsome couple with their brilliant purple, gold and dark-green plumage about the head and neck, grey backs and white breasts. The writer has only heard of one nest having been found in the islands in recent years.

Loggerhead Duck (*Tachyeres cinereus*). Pages 20, 21. The Loggerhead or Steamer Duck is "a common object of the sea-shore." The nest may be found any time from the middle of September to well on in December. The usual number of eggs is from six to eight, but sometimes the duck will sit on four, and families of ten or eleven are seen occasionally. The drake, easily distinguishable by his brilliant orange bill, is usually on guard while the duck is sitting. He swims backwards and forwards in the sea opposite the nest, giving the well-known bull-frog cry of alarm on seeing an intruder. The nest is either built in the dry kelp, just above high-water mark, sheltered by a cliff (as on page 20) in a hole similar to that of a

Jackass Penguin's, in the grass, diddle-dee, or furze, in a tussac bush on the side of a cliff, or some distance inland. The parents have an anxious time protecting the little ones from Sea Hens (page 57) or Gulls (pages 38-40). Large numbers of the immature birds, and those that have no mates, congregate on grassy flats, when they are not in the water feeding. The eggs are used for eating, but must be very fresh to be palatable, and are better fried than boiled.

Red-backed Buzzard (*Buteo erythronotus*). Page 22. Generally known as the Blue Hawk because of its blue-grey wings, this bird is not very numerous in the Falklands. The female is larger than the male, and is distinguished by her red-brown back. They build nests of sticks, from the diddle-dee and fachina bushes, lined with grass, in quite inaccessible places as a rule. The one photographed was on the side of a cliff overlooking a salt-water creek. The eggs are whitish with red-brown markings.

Turkey Buzzard (*Cathartes falklandicus*). Page 23. The Turkey Buzzard is fairly common, and on some sheep farms is considered so destructive that war is waged on him and all his family. As a scavenger he is useful, feeding on any kind of refuse, dead birds and animals. Turkey Buzzards are rather repulsive-looking creatures at close quarters with their bald red heads and necks, but when soaring aloft over their prey they are fascinating to watch. They nest in September, as a rule, laying two eggs, white with red markings, which markings vary very much. The nests are in boles on tussac islands, or under projecting tussac bogs, or sometimes they are on the level of the beach under overhanging rocks. After the breeding season they frequently gather in colonies, twenty or thirty together. When wounded they offer no resistance as a hawk would do, but try to get away into some hiding place.

White-bellied Shag or King Shag (*Phalacrocorax albiventer*). Pages 24-28. These birds take a long time to get their nests in order, as petty theft is one of their failings, and with running about, snatching little bits of building material from each other and incessant conversation, many hours are wasted. "To make a noise like that of a shag rookery" is a proverbial saying in the Falklands. On page 27 incomplete nests are shown. These are built up with mud and dirt, lined with seaweeds, and are all right for the three bluish-white eggs which are usually laid in November, but they are lamentably small when the three eggs have been hatched and the young ones grown to the size shown on page 24. Worse still are they when five or six of these youngsters lose their heads and make a rush for one nest (page 25), the nest in question being already occupied by an old bird. The rookeries are generally on flat ledges of rock below the cliffs, or on sloping or flat spaces along the top of a cliff, and are sometimes co-tenanted by Rocky Penguins.

Rock or Black Shag (*Phalacrocorax magellanicus*). Pages 29-32. This is a smaller bird than the King Shag, and has a black throat in the normal adult plumage, as on page 29, though some have slight traces of white on the throat, as on pages 30 and 31. It nests on ledges along the sides of cliffs and gulches, not on flat open spaces like the King Shag. These nests are often quite picturesque

and gay with the little bits of colour supplied by odd pieces of green and red seaweed, dry tussac grass, straw, green weeds, or diddle-dee twigs; they usually contain three greenish-white chalky eggs, laid in November. Shags' eggs, both Kings' and Rocks', are considered by some people good to eat, but are inclined to be decidedly "tasty." It is not generally known that Shags have no tongues. The young birds are brown for the first year, when they change their plumage to black and white.

Sheathbill (*Chionis alba*). Pages 33-35. The Sheathbill is locally called the Kelp Pigeon, from its resemblance to a snow-white pigeon, and from its feeding principally along the shore among the kelp. It may be seen about on the beaches and rocks at all times of the year, chiefly on some of the outlying islands, in the summer scavenging in the neighbourhood of Shag and Penguin rookeries. Its eggs have seldom, if ever, been found in the Falkland Islands.

Blue, Grey or Dolphin Gull (*Leucophaeus scoreshyi*). Pages 35-37. The Dolphin Gulls breed in the Falklands; nesting in December, they lay three greenish eggs with varying brown markings. They are pretty birds with their crimson bills and legs, dark and light-grey plumage and snow-white tails. They have no respect for the property of others, but hover in the neighbourhood of Shag and Penguin rookeries on the chance of carrying off the eggs. In the winter they become very tame round some of the settlements, coming to feed with the poultry, and taking a good deal more than a fair share of the food if they are not sharply looked after.

Southern Black-backed or Dominican Gull (*Larus dominicanus*). Pages 38-40. These birds are locally called Big Gulls as they are the largest and most common of the Falkland Gulls. They nest, as a rule, in colonies, either up on the land in grass or diddle-dee, or on the beaches, but solitary nests are also found. The photographs on pages 38 and 39 illustrate the way in which they will take advantage of any protection from the wind for their nests, on an exposed sand beach; these being in the angle formed by some pieces of drift wood and in the lee of a large piece of whalebone respectively. They are built of wool, grass, and seaweeds. The usual number of eggs laid is three; these vary much in size, colour, and markings, even in the same nest. The eggs are good for eating, boiled, fried, or in "flapjacks," etc. The Gulls themselves break and eat numbers of their own and their neighbours' eggs, or they would increase more rapidly than they do at present. They will eat any rubbish that comes in their way, from scraps of paper and cotton wool to carrion, and are almost as bad as the Sea Hens (page 57) in attacking, or carrying off, live animals and birds. The young birds are grey with black bills; these change to yellow with a red spot below when they are almost a year old, by which time the plumage is black and white, as is shown in the photograph of the mature specimen on page 40.

Johnny Rook (*Ibycter australis*). Pages 41, 42. The Johnny Rook has decreased in numbers in the Falklands of late years. A much more gentlemanly scavenger in appearance than the Turkey Buzzard (page 23), the adult bird is almost black with white bands across the wings and end of tail, while the immature plumage is a

very dark brown, and the wing and tail bands are buff coloured. He builds chiefly on cliffs or ledges of rock, not easy of access, using the diddle-dee or other twigs with grass and wool for the lining. The three dark reddish eggs are laid in October or November. The Johnny Rook is on the list of birds for whose destruction a reward is offered, on account of the damage done to sheep and lambs. He is always ready to pounce on goslings or other young birds. In winter he becomes so tame that he will follow a man carrying a gun and may often be seen devouring the remains of a bird as on pages 41 and 42.

Brown or Golden Grebe (*Podiceps rollandi*). Pages 43, 44. This handsome little brown bird looks almost golden in the sunshine. The head is dark brown with a white patch behind the eye. The nests are built under grass overhanging the water at the edges of ponds and streams, or in the shallow ponds themselves. These pond nests are constructed of mud, grass, and weeds raised up out of the water; one bird will collect bits of these building materials and climb quickly into the nest, bending over the sides to fit them neatly in, while the mate swims round to keep off strangers. Nests have been found with from one to three eggs in them, from the middle of October to January. The eggs are white when laid, but become much stained; the birds sometimes cover them with weeds when leaving the nest. The diving powers of these birds are marvellous, but they do not seem to fly. They scuttle along over the water and appear to be half flying, half running over it.

Upland Goose (*Chloëphaga magellanica*). Pages 45-47. The Upland Goose is to be seen in all parts of the Falklands. The head and neck of the male bird are white, the breast and underparts being barred with black, while the wings, which are grey-black, have a noticeable stripe of green and white on the wing-coverts. The bill, legs, and feet are of a grey-black colour. The female is reddish-brown, with wings and bill similar to those of the male in colour, but the legs and feet are yellow. Nests may be found throughout the spring and early summer, from August to December. The number of pale cream-coloured eggs usually laid is five or six. While the goose is sitting, as on page 46, the gander strolls about or stands on guard, generally to windward of the nest; he whistles on the approach of any danger. The eggs are eaten early in the season, as are the goslings when old enough. The adult birds are also used for food, they are considered in perfection when the diddle-dee berries (on which they feed largely) are ripe. They eat grass to such an extent that the farmers have thousands destroyed annually in order to save it for the sheep.

Kelp Goose (*Chloëphaga hybrida*). Pages 48-56. This bird is ornamental, but not useful, as it is no good for food. It does no damage so is allowed to live in peace. A pair of these beautiful birds is shown on page 53. They feed only along the beaches, where they may be counted sometimes by the score during the winter months. Their nests are built near the shore, actually on the beach as a rule, that on page 48 was at the foot of a cliff in the dry kelp, lined with down. A nest up on the land is seen on page 49 with the down partly covering the three eggs, partly disarranged by the goose. The photograph on page 50 is of the same goose settled

on her nest again. On page 51 is a nest in long grass containing two newly hatched goslings that had evidently not the necessary strength to follow the rest of the family down to the sea. Five or six eggs is the usual number, they are generally laid in late October or in November. Immature geese are shown on page 52.

Antarctic Skua (*Megalestris antarctica*). Page 57. The Antarctic Skua is known locally as the Sea Hen. Arriving in the Falkland Islands about the middle of October, these bold bad birds remain till April, at the end of which month all but stragglers have departed. Lambs, sheep when helpless on their backs, goslings, ducklings, and any such defenceless creatures, are unmercifully attacked by them. About the end of December, when their own youngsters are hatched, Sea Hens make things remarkably unpleasant for any human beings, horses, or dogs that come their way, swooping down at a terrific pace and screaming harshly. The chicks, when first out of the eggs, are little yellow downy things, as on page 57. The adult birds are dark brown with a white stripe across the wings.

Crested Duck or Grey Duck (*Anas cristata*). Page 58. The Grey Duck is very plentiful in many parts of the islands. It does not keep strictly to the calendar with regard to nesting, as some birds do, for one hears of the eggs being found as early as July, and as late as March or April. The nests are soft and downy, generally containing five eggs of a creamy-white colour, and built in long grass. Although a brood of five quite small birds is often seen, the pathetic sight of the parents anxiously guarding their last couple, or even a single youngster, is more common, the others presumably having met with death "by misadventure" or Gulls?

Mollymawk (*Diomedea melanophrys*). Pages 59, 60. The Mollymawk breeds in large numbers on a few of the islands in the West Falklands, and on the Beauchene Islands. These birds spend the winter at sea, returning early in October to lay their one big egg, which is a dirty white colour with reddish spots and markings at the larger end. The eggs are collected for eating, some being used while fresh and others preserved for the winter. The photographs on pages 59 and 60 are of an immature Mollymawk that had strayed inland on the East Falklands, and was in a rather exhausted condition.

Tussac or Black Bird (*Cinclodes antarcticus*). Page 61. These little birds are very tame and friendly, and as inquisitive as an English robin. They build in holes and crevices in cliffs, under overhanging rocks, and in any convenient shelter. One nest was found in an old box on the heath; the box was about twenty inches square, and had two entrances by which the little grass nest was reached. Two eggs are laid some time in October or November. Tussac birds twitter much like swallows, and often come close to a house or into it. They will even fly into the kitchen and peck at any food on the table, or enter a bedroom on a fine morning, sit on the looking-glass and chatter till the occupant awakes. They are very quarrelsome among themselves; when angry they have a habit of spreading their wings above their heads, chattering the while in a shrill and scolding manner. They eat house flies and flourish on islands where there are no cats or rats.

Black Oyster-Catcher or Black Curlew (*Haematopus ater*). Page 62. The Black Curlew is scarcer and less noisy than the Black and White Curlew (pages 63 and 64). The eggs are laid later also, and not much is done in the way of building a nest. A typical nesting place is shown on page 62, the pinkish-white eggs with dark brown markings being laid in a very slight depression in the dry kelp, just above the high water line. But for their red bills and pink legs and feet these birds would often remain unnoticed while standing on the shore among stones and kelp, as they have no white in their plumage.

Pied Oyster-Catcher (*Haematopus leucopus*). Pages 63 and 64. This bird is also known as the Black and White Curlew. It may be seen and heard in large numbers, except in the breeding season. The Curlews go about in flocks, as many as fifty or sixty feeding on the beaches in shallow water or pools. When disturbed they all rise together uttering their shrill dismal cry. They differ from the Black Curlew in having the breast and back part of the wing white. Their eggs are found towards the end of September, and any time in October. The nest on page 63 was on a small island, a few feet above the beach in a slight hollow of the tussac bog, lined with dry tussac. More often they deposit their eggs on the beach itself, among dry kelp, or in the open on pebbles, with no attempt at a nest. The two eggs have brown markings on various shades of green. Curlews are very noisy at nesting time, they run along with their tails erect and bills nearly touching the ground. They not only object to the presence of human beings in the breeding season, but may often be seen chasing and bullying Sea Hens, Hawks, and Gulls, which they evidently suspect of having designs on their eggs or young.

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