

escape notice. Its usual upright attitude as it sits motionless midst the green leaves of a tropical bush put to the best protective advantage the uniform green of its upper parts while the pointing of the bill vertically may be the result of protective impulse, as shown in the case of the Least Bittern (*Ardetta exilis*).

The Tody is an example of the many curious forms of bird life which, combining bright plumage with strange form and habits, make the tropics such an ornithological wonderland.

AMONG THE VULTURES IN ASIA MINOR.

BY H. C. TRACY.

THE same varieties of the vultures occurring in Southern Europe, from Spain to Greece, and on the opposite shores of the Mediterranean, are met with in Asia Minor, where they are common enough to attract the attention of the travelers, although not so numerous as the hosts of them seen in some parts of Egypt.

The little Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*), corresponding to the American Turkey Vulture, is common in the vicinity of Turkish towns, but seldom so domestic a street scavenger as to deserve the name of "Pharaoh's Chicken," as the species is familiarly called.

The bird from whom our ideas of the vulture tribe are usually taken is the Tawny Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), otherwise Gryphon, or Griffin Vulture, equally well named the Goose Vulture, from the general proportions of the long neck, evenly merging head and small eyes. The Tawny Vulture is by far the commonest, and composes the greater part of the flock gathered about any large carrion on the plain.

A far less common species is the Black Vulture, for which scientific terminology has found the fitting name of *Vultur monachus*; the distinctly marked patch of down on the

back of the head, contrasting with a neck as smooth as if it had been shaved, reminds one of the tonsure of a monk, while the large head and eyes, as well as the upright carriage of the bird, give it a dignity that marks it as superior to the common species. In its habits, too, the Monk Vulture is more secluded than the gregarious Gryphon.

The only remaining variety that a traveler in Asia Minor may expect to see is the Bearded Vulture (*Grypætus barbatus*), the famous Lämmergeyer of Switzerland. But aside from the authority of the naturalists, according to which this bird is not a true vulture, even a slight acquaintance with its striking and attractive qualities must insure it a distinct place in the mind of an observer, a place which it has long held in the popular imagination. Yet this bird of Alpine summits and abysses, and of romantic courage and fierceness, may often be seen in tame environments and under prosaic conditions. But wherever seen, its fine form, handsome plumage and spirited eye compel our admiration, and we call it a noble bird.

In traveling through any vulture district one must be content as a rule to watch the birds at a distance, in their soaring flight, an exhibition of organic mechanism well worth studying. But to make a closer acquaintance one must take time for stalking, baiting, and ambush.

With something left of the youthful eagerness with which I used to set out on a vain hunt for the big game of the upper air, I started up the mountain one clear morning two summers ago, with the intention of decoying and securing a specimen of one of the larger vultures. Instead of the antiquated shot-gun, on which my boyish endeavors had to rely, I was equipped with a forty-four caliber Winchester repeating rifle, which formidable destroyer, be it remembered, could only enter the country of the Turk when brought personally by an American consul—a favor done for us by Consul Jewett, of Sivas.

The occasion of the vulture hunt was the demand for specimens to be set up in the new but promising attempt at

a museum in Anatolia College at Marsovan. In order to make the most of the affair I had begun on a previous trial with an experiment in imitation of the one used by Audubon long ago, to shed light on the question of how vultures find the carcass of an animal, whether by sight or by scent. Using the stuffed skin of a deer Audubon succeeded in completely deceiving one American Turkey Vulture so that it had to try at the dry hide repeatedly before becoming convinced that the deer was a hoax. The test was completed by concealing the body of a hog in the field, and finding it undiscovered by the birds after days of putrefaction, the covering of dry grasses having been no hindrance to the spread of the odor. Using the skin of a small roe deer, I waited in vain in ambush for the approach of any carrion bird; but when the same skin was left out a day with the intestines of a sheep used to fill the abdomen, there were evidences of an experimental visit of some large bird. But when in place of the deerskin was put an equivalent amount of fresh meat, there was a hungry vulture on hand before long to make a meal of it. This being a full sized Tawny Vulture was secured without ceremony. The experiment so far indicated that the great Asiatic vultures depend on sight for finding their food, and, as is perfectly natural, can more quickly distinguish the red signal of flesh without its covering of skin and hair.

It was after this first acquisition of a big bird had been laboriously sponged over, skinned and treated, that the more interesting ambush followed that I am to describe.

It was not to be supposed that the vulture is an early bird; so it was not till nine o'clock that I reached the spot chosen for the morning's work: a small cave in a ledge of rocks, the entrance having been screened the day before with fresh oak branches corresponding with the stunted scrub oak that springs from the clefts of rock. There came to this spot two men and a donkey, there departed one man and a donkey minus its load of buffalo meat; but birds cannot count, and none noticed the discrepancy. Soon the sham

carcass, composed of a leg, a side and shoulder deposited thirty or forty yards from the cave, was covered with chattering magpies, whose immaculate plumage and reflections of blue and green belie their sordid tastes. For one hour they banqueted noisily, when they were disturbed by the arrival of a guest several sizes larger than themselves, who then took undisturbed possession of the feast. It was the Egyptian Vulture, a white bird with black wings and yellow bill and feet, that can with some consistency be called Pharaoh's Chicken, as far as its size and appearance are concerned; for although its wings spread six feet, its body is not much larger than that of a large fowl, and its neck is neither so long nor so bare as that of the large vultures; in fact, only the head lacks feathers. This visitor was a most propitious guest for my purpose, as his presence would seem to the birds of the upper regions an assurance of safety and hasten their coming.

I was destined to undergo some suspense, however, before my dinner party was complete. A bird of magnificent breadth of wing was circling around the place, in every nearing of his course making me puzzle over his identity and especially as to the peculiar formation of his beak which, indistinctly seen as he flew, appeared double, and only when I came to know the bird better, proved to be the beard of the Bearded Vulture, or, as we prefer to call him, the Lämmergeier, the bird having the largest length and breadth measurements of all the birds of Europe and Asia. At intervals this bird emitted a curious buzzing sound, the only sound which I have heard uttered by the Lämmergeier. But before he had fully determined to alight, things took a more decisive turn. There was a rush of wind that made my heart beat faster as the gaunt watchers descended from their height, one after another in quick succession till the quiet scene of the past hour was suddenly transformed to one of confusion, the carnival of the Harpies gorging on the booty or with striking wings and clattering bills disputing possession of a morsel. The scene was complete when the

Lämmergeier alighted on a rock near by to watch the performance, in whose gluttony he had no need to share, and when a single Black Vulture, or Monk Vulture, as we might well call him, after the example of the Germans, had descended among the group of tawny gourmands, and then, as behooves a member of a clerical order, stepped aside and turned his dignified back on the vulgar crowd. But for the rifle in my hand I might have waited indefinitely, absorbed in this strange sight; the rifle reminded me of my purpose, which was to get possession of the black gown of this same monkish guest, the victim of my treachery. I was excited. I raised the rifle, looked along its shaking barrel, and lowered it, experiencing emotions which are more novel, and perhaps better worth while than those of an experienced hunter. After partly succeeding in quieting the absurd trembling of that gun barrel, I fired. The black target rose into the air; the smoke obscured it for a moment, and I rushed out and fired wild shots at the retreating forms of the birds till they were out of range. Then, glancing down the mountain side I saw a mass of black prone on the ground. It was the Monk Vulture who had flown ten yards only to fall dead, with the great arteries severed at the heart. His length was three feet and eight inches, and his spread of wings from tip to tip nine feet and eight inches. These measurements are a little more than those of the Tawny Vulture, and a little less than those of the Lämmergeier.

Thus ended the morning among the vultures. I can only regret that I shall never know how the feast would have ended, and what part the Bearded Vulture and the Monk Vulture would have played, if I had left the Winchester at home.



Tracy, Henry Chester. 1902. "Among the Vultures in Asia Minor." *The Wilson bulletin* 14(4), 116–120.

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