

CROWS ARE SMARTER THAN 'WISE' OWLS

BY AUSTIN L. RAND
CURATOR OF BIRDS

THE OWL has always been considered the symbol of wisdom. The old saying has it that "fine feathers don't make fine birds," but I'm afraid that the owl has taken in people with its appearance. The owl's reputation for wisdom seems to be based on a staid, impressive appearance combined with an inarticulate disposition. Though owls do at times make a great deal of noise by hooting, shrieking, and whistling, much of the time the owl sits quietly looking wise and saying nothing.

But owls don't seem to have much behind the front they put up. People who have studied them find that the young are very slow to learn to feed themselves. One saw-



whet owl that was kept captive refused to eat liver put into its cage, apparently not recognizing the meat as food. But when the liver was crammed into an empty mouse skin the owl at once ate it. One might conclude that the owl was the original "stuffed shirt."

The crows and their relative, the jays, are the birds that are really intelligent. They are active and usually have little trouble getting enough to eat. They have an abounding curiosity that leads them to spend their time investigating things and getting new experiences. And they seem to profit by these experiences, too.

JAY LEARNS QUICKLY

That a jay learns quickly was well illustrated by a captive jay learning to pull up a small bucket-like container of food swung by a string about 8 inches below the perch. Within three days the jay was regularly pulling up the container. He would reach down and seize the string, pulling it up and holding it under his foot while he pulled up another length. He repeated this sometimes as many as five times until he could reach the bucket.

The following is how ravens co-operated in getting a bone from a dog:

"He was espied by a raven who flew down and tried to scare the dog by loud cawing, in which he was shortly afterwards assisted by another, both birds sidling up to the dog's head until they were barely out of his reach. Just at this time a third raven appeared on the scene and surveyed the situation from an adjacent fence, but soon flew down behind the dog and advanced until within reach of his tail, which he seized so roughly that the dog turned for an instant to snap at him, and at the same moment the bone was snatched away by one of the ravens at his head."

THEY RECOGNIZE PERIL

Crows have been recorded as profiting by the experience of some of their numbers. In Washington, when almonds were ripening in the almond orchards and crows were swarming there threatening to destroy the nut crop, an estimated 30,000 crows were involved and the destruction of an \$800-crop was complete in two days. Various methods of control were tried unsuccessfully. Finally some almonds were slit open, poisoned, and scattered about in the orchards. Very few crows were actually poisoned, the number not exceeding 1 per cent of the flock. The first reaction of the crows when one of their flock was poisoned was extreme panic. There was tumultuous clamoring and confusion. Then the flock abandoned the attempts to feed on almonds and left the area completely. Here we have a case of superior intelligence. The crows profited by the sight of a few of their number being poisoned and fled the area, thus escaping being poisoned themselves. They learned from the experience of others.

NEW MEMBERS

The following persons became Museum Members between June 16 and July 14:

Contributors

Henry W. Nichols,* Dr. William Clarence Ohlendorf.

Life Members

Dr. James W. Walker

Associate Members

Mrs. M. Lee Alberts, Philip T. Atwood, David S. Brown, David L. Shillinglaw.

Annual Members

H. E. Anning, Harve Gordon Badgerow, C. R. Baxter, Miss Mildred W. Benson, Miss Anne Bird, Carleton Blunt, William F. Borland, Martin H. Braun, Dr. Winston I. Breslin, Leonard C. Childs, Dr. Herman Chor, Marion D. Cloud, Carl Cremer, George T. Davis, Mrs. Bessie Neuberg Heinze, Adrian O. Holmberg, J. Laurence Kleinfeld, Henry T. Mathews, Donald R. McLennan, Jr., H. S. Nachman, Arthur W. Nelson, LeRoy H. Nettin, Miss Irma L. Richards, Charles L. Schrager, L. C. Schumaker, H. Kellogg Smith, Reuben C. Taylor, Jr., Frederick F. Webster, W. E. Weitman, Donald G. Wilmarth.

*Deceased

FIFTY YEARS AGO AT THE MUSEUM

Compiled by MARGARET J. BAUER

"The Curator of the Department of Botany says: 'The only field work carried on has been that of Preparator Lansing, who has continued, under the supervision of the Curator, his collection of the plants of the "Lake Chicago Basin," in which he has secured an addition of 512 specimens, including many rare local species, and has continued his notes on the region. This work is particularly important, as not many years hence nearly the whole distinctive plant life of the section under study will become extinct through the drainage and reclaiming of the land and the extension of the city of Chicago and surrounding suburban towns.'"—*Annual Report of the Director, 1900.*

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"The addition of microscopic apparatuses in the Division of Photography has permitted a new and important line of work to be entered upon, while the provision of new type and other facilities have brought the printing office up to a standard of considerable proficiency. . . .

"The demands of visitors for the printed guide continues with gratification, and the sixth edition made its appearance this year, somewhat improved over previous issues because of a condensation of bulk without a relinquishment of fact."—*Annual Report of the Director, 1900.*

SUMMER LECTURE TOURS GIVEN TWICE A DAY

During August, conducted tours of the exhibits, under the guidance of staff lecturers, will be given on a special schedule, as follows:

Mondays: 11 A.M.—The Earth's Story (general survey of the geology exhibits); 2 P.M.—General Tour.

Tuesdays: 11 A.M.—The World of Plants (general survey of the plant exhibits); 2 P.M.—General Tour.

Wednesdays: 11 A.M.—The Animal Kingdom (general survey of the animal exhibits); 2 P.M.—General Tour.

Thursdays: 11 A.M. and 2 P.M.—General Tours.

Fridays: 11 A.M.—The Story of Man (general survey of the anthropology exhibits); 2 P.M.—General Tour.

There are no tours on Saturdays and Sundays during August.

... And wilful waste, depend upon't
Brings almost always woeful want.

—ANN TAYLOR



Rand, Austin Loomer. 1950. "Crows are Smarter than 'Wise' Owls." *Bulletin* 21(8), 5-5.

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