

CAN GULLS DIVE?—Lately this subject has been discussed through "Nature Notes and Queries"—a column weekly in a daily paper, *The Argus*—and to my way of thinking it is one that is apt to be rather confusing, especially to those not knowing the difference between birds scientifically known as divers and those that simply perform a dive brought about by momentum.

One contributor to these notes stated that he witnessed many Pacific Gulls (*Gabianus pacificus*) rise into the air, and the momentum gained in their downward flight enabled these birds to secure their prey about 4 feet below the surface, and, as far as he was concerned, settled the question regarding this particular species as a diver. Acknowledging that performances like these come within the meaning of the word dive, this does not certify that they belong to the family of divers. Because a bird rises into the air and the momentum acquired in its downward course enables it to dive below the surface and secure its prey at a depth no greater than the momentum thus gained enables it to reach, and upon that power being spent is forced back to the surface, actions like these do not in my opinion classify them among the divers. For example, take a glance at any of the birds belonging to such genera as *Phalacrocorax*, *Plotus*, *Podiceps*, *Anas*, *Nettion*, *Catarrhactes*, and others—why, a single glance is enough to satisfy the most pessimistic observer that these birds are specially adapted and moulded by nature for diving, also swimming while submerged. Take the wings of a diver: the shoulders are set well forward, while the primaries are short; and the legs are set well back. Have the Gulls Terns, or Gannets these qualities? No.

Any naturalist who has exercised any degree of observation knows that the swimming of birds is nothing more than a walking in the water, where one foot succeeds the other, as on the land, while under water they impel and row themselves forward by a motion of their wings as well as by the impulse of their feet. These actions I have frequently watched while attempting to secure Black Duck (*Anas superciliosa*) that I have wounded upon a clear pool of water. Although well acquainted with the Gulls, Terns, and Gannets, and upon several occasions having slightly winged one of these birds, I have never yet seen a single bird attempt to go under while trying to evade capture. The question arises—Are they able? The Silver Gull (*Larus novæ-hollandiæ*) and Terns, in performing this dive of theirs, upon reaching the water always, as far as my observations go, open their wings—an action, I take it, that lessens the shock and at the same time prevents them from going under. With the Gannets it is just the opposite—they keep their wings closed, thus enabling them to dive to a considerable depth. Regarding Terns, although these birds are web-footed it is rarely they are

seen resting upon the water, their resting-place being either a spit of sand or a rock. These graceful birds flit over the waters, and it is partly through their resemblance in flight and Swallow-shaped tail that they get the name Sea-Swallow. The food of these birds consists chiefly of small fish, which they pounce upon; also molluscs and insects. Gulls, in my estimation, are nothing but scavengers of the high seas.

In conclusion, I trust that I have made myself clear in attempting to define what I consider is the difference between birds that dive by momentum, such as Gulls, Terns, and Gannets, and those which nature has physically moulded for and are known to ornithologists as divers.—C. F. COLE.

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THE RAVEN AT CHARLOTTE PLAINS.—Bird-life as a whole is comparatively quiet in the vicinity of this town (Maryborough) at present, perhaps the liveliest quarter being the open country at the Charlotte Plains (some 12 miles out), and in that locality there is more quantity than variety.

A Word for the Crow.—With the exception of the ubiquitous White-backed Magpie, the most noticeable bird on these plains is the Crow (*Corvus coronoides*).* This bird is always very plentiful hereabouts, but this year they are simply swarming. The recent extreme cold, following hard upon the unusually dry autumn, has been the means of killing off scores of sheep and young lambs, and this is the reason of the Crows being so numerous.

Crows as Scavengers.—Almost every paddock is studded with the dead bodies of the unfortunate animals, and on each carcass is invariably perched half a dozen Crows, tearing off and eating the flesh. In each case the eyes of the beast are always the first to go; then the wool is pulled off, the skin torn open, and the flesh eaten to the last scrap. If a Hawk or any other bird comes near the feasting Crows, the latter attack the intruder in a body until it is driven off.

Fox v. Crow.—We were fortunate enough to observe a decidedly interesting chase, illustrating the pugnacious disposition of these Crows, a few weeks ago. Driving along a road adjoining an open paddock, we were surprised to see five Crows swooping viciously at a fine big fox, which, judging by its actions, fully realized the seriousness of the situation. Adopting the usual ruse of a small animal when thus attacked, Reynard would wait for the Crows to swoop, crouching low on the ground, and each time the birds rose in the air he dashed on for about 20 yards,

* Read Raven (*Corone australis*).—EDS.



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