

## BIRDS OF CHINA.

BY RUFUS H. LEFEVRE.

BIRD-LORE has a part in the mythology of China, for next to the dragon comes the phoenix, which according to legend is a kind of Pheasant. The Chinese picture it variously; it has every color; it is a most graceful and elegant bird; it is regarded as the king of all birds but has not been seen since the time of Confucius. They have given it, too, a very kind disposition for it will not injure living insects or herbs.

The Chinese have many superstitions about birds, and a bird man would save parts of birds that he skinned for various persons desiring to be cured of illness. I also remember meeting a hunter with a Crow that he had shot, and he said he wanted to cook a certain part of it to cure his father of illness.

In the bird market in Peking, a man had a bucket of small black tadpoles for sale at a few coppers a bowl and stated that if you drank them alive they were good for the eyes. This is in line with the superstition in the use of parts of birds.

*Falconry.*—It is recorded that the sport of falconry had quite a place in Ancient China. The Mongol dynasty was fond of the chase with Falcons and Marco Polo writes that Kublai employed no less than seventy thousand attendants on his hawking expeditions, and speaks of trained Eagles of such size and strength that none could resist their talons. Many times have I seen natives carrying Hawks on their wrists, which are usually heavily padded. The bird has a cord to his leg and often wears a leather hood over his eyes, the hoods being for sale in large numbers in Peking. The Sparrow Hawk (*Accipiter nisus*), is most frequently used, and while hunting, several times I have seen men training and using these Hawks to catch small birds. My hunter told me it requires much work to train them, and the men often sit up for several nights with their birds and keep them with them all the time before use. Some men make a regular business of capturing Hawks for falconry purposes. The North China Hawks used in falconry, says Pere David, are the Golden Eagle, Goshawk, Stevenson's Hawk, the Sparrow Hawk, the Saker, the Peregrine and the Hobby.

*Domestic birds.*—The Chinese Domestic Goose and the Mandarin duck are considered emblems of conjugal fidelity, and a pair is always found at wedding processions. They are also used as watch birds for the home and will give instant warning if anyone nears the house, while they will not hesitate to attack a person. I often see in memory our Chinese woman servant jumping up and down, hands waving, feet kicking and our goose holding on to her trousers and beating her with his wings. Ducks and Chickens and Pigeons are common in domestication and a few Turkeys have been introduced. In Peking the Chinese put reed whistles in the tails of birds, so that, as they fly over the city, they make a very pleasant sound.

*Capture of Wild Birds.*—Wild birds are in great demand for cage purposes and are also used for food so that birds of every description are captured. Where money is so scarce as it is in China, it is much cheaper to capture a bird than to pay for the gun powder to shoot it.

One of the most common methods for capturing birds is by smearing a black sticky substance on a perch, which is disguised by limbs or leaves and raised to a high place. Sometimes it is placed on a high pole which is moved about and the call of the bird imitated, or I have seen a series of perches about three feet high stuck in the ground so as to form a circle. In the center a small live bird is tied on one end of a limb which is fastened to the ground and a thread attached to the end to it. The man sits in a blind some distance away and frequently pulls the string so that the bird flutters its wings and thus attracts other birds to the perches. A similar method is used to capture large Hawks, two limbs being bent to a semicircle and placed at right angles, with a Pigeon tied to a limb as in the case of the small bird. The man sits back of the blind of stones a couple hundred feet away and pulls the thread to make the Pigeon flutter his wings. A passing Hawk is attracted and attempts to seize the bird when another string is pulled and a net is drawn over the semi-circular limbs, and the Hawk captured.

In capturing small birds, traps are often used. A two compartment cage is hung on a tree, one side of which contains a live bird, while the other has a revolving top. As the wild bird hears the call of a member of its species it comes and perches on the cage, the top gives way and it drops within the cage.

Birds like Quail, are captured with a net and the boys at Tsingtau caught quite a number in this way. The Quail would fly a short distance in the peanut or soy bean plantations and the boys, noting its position and grasping the ends of a long fishing net, would run rapidly to the place. When the Quail tried to fly it was easily captured.

Again I saw the net used to capture birds in small bushes. It was placed at the end of a row of bushes in a field and men carrying sticks slowly moved along the row on either side tapping on the bushes when the birds inside hopped into the net a third person pounced upon them.

Mr. H. T. Wade in his book, 'With Boat and Gun in the Yangtze Valley', pp. 139-41 describes several methods I have not seen. He says:—"At the close of a cold December, some seven miles from the walled city of Kintang, near a large pond, I saw a man beckoning to me, and as I approached he asked me not to shoot the ducks in the pond. He explained that his friend was in the water; so I waited to see what would happen. After some time his friend landed, wearing a large bamboo collar or cangue, and carrying a basket containing a few wild and three tame ducks secured together by a string. He was dressed in goat-skin with the wool outside; his stockings were stitched to the clothing, and so oiled as to be nearly waterproof. Thus accoutred, he immersed his body, using the cangue as a float. On his hat were placed bunches of grass, and on the cangue two or three decoy-ducks. He slowly approached the wild fowl, and when near enough dexterously caught the unsuspecting duck by the leg, and dragged it under water. I watched him until he had gathered nearly the whole lot.

"A common method of catching Geese is to lay down a long line, to which is attached a number of thin bamboo slips, bent double, and the two ends of bamboo inserted in a bean. This bait is laid on a regular feeding ground, and the hungry goose swallows it greedily, with the result that the act of swallowing liberates the bent bamboo, which, resuming its original shape, chokes the bird."

Mr. S. Wells Williams in Vol. II 'The Middle Kingdom' page 263 says of Canton that: "Ducks are sometimes caught by persons who first cover their heads with a gourd pierced with holes, and then wade into the water where the birds are feeding; these, previ-

ously accustomed to empty calabashes floating about on the water, allow the fowler to approach and are pulled under without difficulty."

Nests of all kinds in China are robbed and the bird markets have many young birds for sale.

*Shooting of Birds.*—Enormous numbers of wild fowl are killed each year. The birds however, become quite wary. The rivers of China have wide open sandy shores so that the wild fowl can usually see a person a half mile or a mile away.

In central Shantung on the Wei river I saw a Chinese trying for Geese. He had lying in the sand a gun barrel that looked like a small cannon which he filled with a tremendous load of powder and shot. Then he connected the spring trigger with a thread and lay in a blind until the Geese approached. When quite a number were in front of the gun he pulled the thread and shot many of them.

The ordinary gun is an iron barrel made by a Chinese smith, usually six feet in length though some shorter ones are now being made. There is usually a stock attached to it. The gun that my collector used had a revolver grip, was at least six feet long and was fired by caps. He held it to his cheek and fired and sometimes his face was marked by the powder. The powder was homemade and the shot was of iron; the gun barrel was never cleaned. Nevertheless he could shoot rather accurately.

Foreign shot guns are being introduced but only the very rich can afford to buy them.

*Cage Birds.*—The Chinese love to have cage birds and as one goes through the streets he will see cages of birds hanging in the stores. The workman has his cage before him and occasionally a farmer is seen working with his bird cage on a nearby grave mound. Gentlemen of leisure who need not work often walk about the streets with a pair of bird cages. Rising early in the morning and going outside the large cities I usually saw several men together with their birds on the grave mounds. The birds were having an early morning airing and sing and often the gentlemen were seen catching insects for their birds.

One can buy many things for cage birds. Cages are of all descriptions, but not elaborate like our cages. They usually have no solid bottom, the refuse being allowed to drop to the ground floor

of the house, but the Lark cages have bottoms with sand for the bird. There are many kinds of seeds and water receptacles, scrapers and forceps to remove dirt from the cage. Worms for bird food can be purchased enclosed in small lengths of hollow stalks. Many birds are also carried on perches with strings about their necks but they flutter wildly and often injure themselves in the market.

The Lung Fu Su and Hua Fu Su markets of Peking have quite a large bird market during the migration times. We always went through these bird markets on the lookout for any new migrating species since all the men catch their birds locally.

The most popular cage bird is the "pei ling" or Mongolian Lark and Dr. Geo. Wilder said that while on a trip to Mongolia he saw them being captured and shipped to China by the tens of thousands. A notable songster will easily bring twenty-five dollars. Others however, are quite reasonable in price. In Peking the Hedge Sparrow is captured along with other Buntings, several kinds of Thrush, the Myna, Silver-eye, Greenfinch, Red-spotted Blue-throat, Siberian Ruby-throat, Titmouse and others. Any wild bird that can be captured is sold in the bird market, and I have seen there most everything from a Warbler to a Swan.

Chinese are quite friendly to the Swallow and it builds its nest on their dwellings undisturbed, and regarded as an omen of good fortune.

*Training Birds.*—No one but a Chinese could take the time to train birds as they do and they will spend endless time teaching them tricks. The Hawfinch, for example, is trained to sit on his perch and when a seed is thrown to him he catches it in his bill. Some small object is thrown into the air and the bird flies up and catches it and is then rewarded with a buckwheat seed. At the market in Peking I saw a man with an inverted disc about ten feet high, which looked like a drooping sun flower. Stuck into it were a number of small flags and a Hawfinch was perched about forty feet away. He would leave his perch, fly over to the flower, secure a flag and return to his perch with the flag in his bill. He was called back by the rattling of the seed box and would be at once rewarded with seed.

Gamblers along the street would also make use of these birds.

They had a number of papers laid overlapping each other near the cage. The cage would be opened, the bird would go out and pull out one of these papers with his bill and you would gamble on which one it would be.

I am often asked whether Cormorants in China really fish for men. My stay was mostly in North China and so I did not see this trick, but I quote Mr. Arthur de C. Sowerby in the February 1926 'Journal of Arts and Science' of which he is editor:—

“In China the use of Cormorants in fishing has been carried to a much greater state of perfection. The birds are tamed to the point when they can be turned loose, and work in flocks of from five to twenty, under the control of two or more men in boats, or canoes (sampan) or even on bamboo rafts. They are prevented from swallowing the fish they catch by the presence of a ring of bast or tow, tied at the base of the neck. In some cases they are carried to the fishing grounds on large boats, fitted with perches, and accompanied by a fleet of small punts or canoes, the latter each manned by two fishermen, one to manoeuvre the boat, the other to attend to the birds and their catches. Arrived at the fishing grounds, the Cormorants are unceremoniously tossed overboard, each bird immediately making for its particular punt and master, who sees to it that his charges, the Cormorants keep busy at their duties. The fleet of small boats spreads out in a line or a crescent formation, the birds all being driven in front, and when all is ready, the men on the punts and the large boat begin to shout and beat the water with the long bamboos they carry for the purpose and for controlling the Cormorants. This sets the fish moving, and forthwith the birds disappear beneath the surface of the water as they go in pursuit of the frightened fish, reappearing each time they catch a large fish or when their pouches are filled with small ones. The men in the punts keep a sharp lookout over their birds, and as soon as each appears with its prey, lifts it out of the water with a flat spoon shaped net at one end of the long bamboo, empties the fish into the bottom of the punt and throws the bird back again. And so the chase progresses till the fish have disappeared from the area being operated, when the birds are taken on board again and the whole party moves on to some other likely spot, where the manoeuvre is repeated and so on till the day's fishing is done. Sometimes and

in some parts of China the fishing is done at night, when great flares are carried on the boat, which serve to attract the fish and also to help the birds to see them. When all is over and the fishing party have returned to their headquarters, a certain portion of the fish caught is set aside and fed to the Cormorants as their share of the prize. Arrived on land, each bird is tied by the leg by a leather thong to its perch. If their home is away from the water's edge, the birds are made to sit on the long bamboos and are so carried by the men to their destination, where they are assigned to their respective perches. To prevent them from flying away their wings are mutilated when young. The stocks of cormorants are replenished from time to time by the capture of mature wild birds or by robbing the latter's nests."

"The use of cormorants as a means of catching fish is very effective, and large catches are made, but the method has its drawbacks, since the size of the fish that can be taken is limited to the capacity of the birds, a one and a half pound fish being about the maximum size that they can manage. Where large fish are plentiful, the fishermen set nets into which the fish swim when frightened by the cormorants and the noise made by the boatmen."

*Number of Birds.*—I have been asked, are birds as numerous in China as in America? The recent tentative list of 'Birds of China' by Gee, Moffet & Wilder, lists 1031 species of birds. Dr. Geo. Wilder said he found about the same number of birds in Chihli Province as in the state of New York. Also he said that the avifauna of Peking compared favorably with that of New York City.

In the Spring and Fall of the year a great migration of birds crosses China. Most of these winter in Southern Asia, the Philippines, or other islands. They breed mostly in Siberia. I lived three years in Shantung and both in the central part of the province and along the coast, there was a very heavy migration.

There are but few new species now to be found in eastern China. There is, however, a great deal of work to be done on migration and study of habits for there are plenty of birds to be found whose habits have not been thoroughly studied.

*Protection.*—Could you imagine America with no bird protection whatsoever? Yet such is the condition in China. At a few places

there are a few laws but they are not enforced. A man can shoot any bird in China and I have seen Chinese returning from the hunt with Thrushes, Larks, Orioles and other fine birds which they procured to eat. The only limit is one's ability to kill birds, and Rev. Everett Johnson, of Peking, told me he once saw a man in the morning sitting under a large tree with a gun; in the evening he was still there and had a large pile of song birds beside him.

The only restriction at present is that no foreigners shall export scientific specimens. I do not know of a single Chinese who has done any real ornithological work so that this is a startling inconsistency. The country has gained everything and lost nothing by allowing foreigners to collect and study her fauna since she has no libraries or museums where its birds can be studied and would have to wait a long time until she could do this work herself.

It will be difficult for a very long time to enforce bird protection in China as the country is disorganized, and co-ordinate action on any plan must first go through a period of education.

The fact that so many species of birds do not nest in the thickly populated sections of China is what saves them from extinction.

China has had a few bird preserves. One of them was at the Tung Ling, where are the tombs of the last dynasty of Emperors that ruled China. Back of these tombs was a large forest preserve, one of the very few left in China and it was also a bird preserve. In 1923, four of us journeyed for three days by donkey and hiking to this preserve. It was the northern home of Reeves' Pheasant and had many rare species of birds not found elsewhere. What was our surprise to find that the new government allowed the President's brother to cut down all the trees and as we stood on the mountain top as far as eye could see we observed nothing but tree stumps. The underbrush had been burnt out to prevent regrowth and as we journeyed for a few days through this area we were constantly greeted by this sight. By day we saw and by night we heard the bells of the caravans of camels carrying away the timber. This meant the destruction of one of the very few great bird and animal preserves of China. It also meant denuded hills and flood.

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