

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## Injury Feigning by Birds.

Editor of 'The Auk':

Re the discussion in your correspondence columns of the origin and meaning of the injury-simulating habits of certain nesting birds. We have all noticed this many times. It is so like a decoy method of consciously leading an enemy from the nest that it is difficult to adopt a more mechanistic theory. An experience of some years ago may have a bearing on the subject.

We were in camp at Shoal Lake, Manitoba. A hundred yards or less in front of our tent a Killdeer had its nest on the open prairie without cover, the only concealment being the likeness of its eggs to a few wood chips and the debris in the scanty grass. We had many opportunities of watching this bird and it was interesting to see how it reacted to different potential enemies.

If a horse or cow grazed too near the bird lay low until almost the last minute and then flew suddenly into its face with a great outcry. The animal invariably staggered back at the unexpected onslaught and circled the spot in confusion while the bird, its object accomplished, after a few dives and expostulations returned quietly to its nest. However, when a man or a dog approached, it flew to meet him from afar, indulged in all the broken-winged helplessness with which we are familiar and led the enemy far from the nest before returning to it. These two schemes of action happened too often that summer to be the result of casual accident. The reaction in respect to the dog was particularly interesting. The dog, slavering and all excitement, pursued the bird closely. Every moment we expected to see its jaws close upon its expected prey but each time that prey escaped by a margin so small that hopes of success were raised instead of dampened and the chase was hot. As they drew away from the immediate neighborhood the bird took less and less chances until finally the dog was tearing futilely around far from the point of encounter and evidently without thought of returning to it.

I have not been able to verify these proceedings elsewhere or since but in the case of this particular bird the difference with which it treated a harmless blunderer and an active hunter was particularly striking and goes a long way towards suggesting that the feigning is more or less calculated and not the result of a blind mixture of conflicting fears.

P. A. TAVERNER.

National Museum of Canada.

Editor of 'The Auk':

In the July 1935 issue of 'The Auk' there appeared a letter under "Correspondence" on "Injury-feigning" among various species of birds. H. S. Swarth stated therein that he did not recall ever having seen a passerine bird resort to injury-feigning. With the exception of the Ovenbird my experience tallies with his. In the course of correspondence with Swarth on the subject it was suggested that I submit my own experience with injury-feigning by Ovenbirds.

Concerning this species I may say that I have never known it to flush immediately from the nest on my approach. Usually the adult bird would run a short distance, then stumble and flutter its wings as if one leg refused to function properly. This stumbling shifted from one leg to the other giving a rather aimless appearance to the performance. The sequence was always the same; the short run from the nest, the

stumbling and wing-fluttering, and finally the escape of the bird by flying. One peculiarity noticed was that the bird did not wait to see if I was following, but rather went through the act in set fashion regardless of whether I ran after her or remained by the nest, except that she would fly sooner if I pursued her closely. In no case did the display last more than a few seconds, the time required for the adult bird to cover about two or three rods of ground.

It appeared as if the entire act took place almost automatically, so machine-like were the movements of the mother. I have seen this display made by other individuals, but it has always been the same stereotyped performance. Perhaps it may be said that such a display is not real injury-feigning at all because of its more or less fixed sequence, but the fact remains that I have flushed many Ovenbirds at other times in the year and I have never seen one do more than run a short distance before flying. There was no attempt at self display.

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Editor of 'The Auk':

Francis H. Allen's letter of August 15, 1935, published in 'The Auk' (Vol. LIII, p. 125) comments on a statement by Dr. Herbert Friedmann, in his paper "The Instinctive Emotions of Birds," that he (Friedmann) had never seen any Grouse or Quail practicing "injury feigning."

Observations as a boy on a farm of central North Dakota would lead me to believe that injury feigning is practiced by the Prairie Chicken or Pinnated Grouse, *Tympanuchus americanus americanus*. In my observations, the female bird when molested would leave her nest in the prairie grass and flutter away for a distance, as though a wing were broken, before taking off.

ADRIAN C. FOX.

Park River,  
North Dakota.

Editor of 'The Auk':

Some twenty-five years ago I found the nest of a Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica aestiva*) in a bush about four feet from the ground. The sitting bird when flushed from the nest fluttered away, still in the branches, with the "broken wing" action. Though I have found a good many nests since none of the birds acted in this way.

LAURENCE B. POTTER.

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#### Portenko on *Limosa lapponica*.

Editor of 'The Auk':

The last number of "The Auk" (Vol. LIII, No. 2, p. 194-197) contains a paper by L. Portenko (= Portenko) on the geographical races of the Bar-tailed Godwit, which is likely to provoke serious criticism. The author divides into two races the well known Siberian Godwit (*Limosa lapponica baueri* Naumann) which was originally described from an Australian winter specimen. This type specimen of *baueri* had not been examined by Portenko, nor are the reasons given why the name *baueri* is employed for the bird which occurs only in a small region of easternmost Siberia