

SOME EXPERIENCES OF A COLLECTOR IN ALASKA

By JOSEPH DIXON

(*Editorial Note.*—Mr. Dixon is a member of the party headed by Miss A. M. Alexander for the purpose of exploring from a faunal standpoint some of the islands of southeastern Alaska. The following article is compiled with scarcely any emendations from personal letters written by Mr. Dixon to the Editor of this Magazine. We hope we do not overestimate the interest which we believe should attach to such direct accounts of the conditions under which the field naturalist must work in that portion of our continent. This is in no wise intended as an exploitation of the scientific results of the expedition, which will doubtless be reported upon in an altogether different form.—J. G.)

Windfall Harbor, Admiralty Island, May, 2, 1907.—We made camp on the west side of the harbor in a little cove on April 17. We had to cut into a snow bank in order to make a level place to pitch our tents. We have six tents up but we need them all: three sleeping tents, one cooking tent, one work tent and a store room.

When we came there was from four to eight feet of snow on the level but we have had several warm days so the snow is not so bad now.

The only place you can hunt is along the beach. The harbor froze over last night and the alders have not opened their buds yet. The skunk cabbage is just coming up. No flowers yet but we have seen two butterflies (not cabbage either!) as well as a Rufous Hummer today. We failed to get any of them however.

I was just figuring up tonight and found that during the two weeks we have been here we have collected 171 specimens, 109 mammals and 62 birds. Of mammals we have two fresh bear skins, about 12 *Microtus*, seven shrews, two mink and about 65 *Peromyscus*. The *Peromyscus* average about: length 189; tail 98; hindfoot 23. This cannot be *P. sitkensis* as we first supposed as the latter are much larger. It doesn't measure up right for *P. keeni* either. Perhaps it is nearer the mainland form. They are a rich brown on the sides. We saw our first bat last night, probably a *Myotis* of some kind. The bears are just coming out of their dens and are staying up around the snow slides and the upper edge of the timber where they feed on deer that are about starved to death. It is impossible to hunt them without snow shoes. The two skins were bought from the natives. One is an exceptionally fine one almost black. We have both skulls. They were killed about 30 miles south of here where they come out early. The minks we bought from the natives too. We can't find any and they only got eleven during the entire winter.

Of birds we have taken: Canada Goose, Scaup Duck, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Pigeon Guillemot (half winter, half summer plumage), Marbled Murrelet, Short-billed and Bonaparte Gulls, Sooty Grouse, Northern Raven, Northwest Crow, Northern Red-breasted Sapsucker, Song Sparrow, Sitka Kinglet, Siskin, Hermit Thrush, Varied Thrush, Robin, Winter Wren, Chestnut-backed Chickadee, Townsend Fox Sparrow and Sandwich Sparrow.

A pair of small rosy red Crossbills were seen today. They were evidently not the White-winged. We saw an owl the other night that was almost as big as an eagle. We had just emptied both guns at a flock of geese when he flew out from a tall tree. We also heard another (Horned) owl hooting that night, and also what we call our "tin can owl." It had a little tinkling note something like that one at Bluff Lake, but it kept going all the time only stopping once in a while for breath. Another little owl was hollering over camp just at day break the other morning but we couldn't find him. The natives say there are lots of Ptarmigan

here on the beach during the winter but they have gone back to the mountains now.

May 4.—You will probably get this letter on the installment plan as I will keep writing off and on as the spirit moves me until the boat comes and I have a chance to send the letter to Juneau.

I took a fine set of Bald Eagle on the 30th of April. The nest was in the very tip-top of a broken-topped spruce, 116 feet from the ground. The nest was seven feet in diameter and big and strong enough so that I could stretch out in it. The eggs were fresh and are not much nest stained. The old birds wouldn't fight at all!

I took a female, nest and four fresh eggs of a Townsend Fox Sparrow yesterday. I think it is *townsendi*; any way I have seven specimens now so that I guess I can find out when we get back to civilization. The nest was about 50 feet back from high tide in a thick clump of spruce boughs that drooped almost to the ground. The nest was about eight feet up. The whole vicinity was dark and damp and the nest hung over a pool of water. These sparrows look and act almost like *stephensi*. I found the nest a week ago by watching the female carry feathers. I had to wade thru snow to get the nest yesterday so perhaps that will throw some light on the date of breeding of *stephensi*.

Mr. Littlejohn got two Crossbills yesterday and one today, all males in breeding condition. One was almost one-third less in size than the other but was evidently the same species. They are not White-winged.

We fired into a flock of about a dozen waders the other day and picked up four Aleutian Sandpipers, a Black Turnstone and a Surf Bird. We were surprised to find all three species together.

The Indians up here think that they own the whole country. They have tried several schemes to get us out. They want us to pay them for hunting here. Whatever their faults may be they certainly are candid. One old squaw came over the other day and we finally got her to talk English, and she said: "Bear he heap smart, he hear gun he no come. You white men damn fools; shoot! shoot!! shoot!!! all the time." It seems to be beyond their thick heads to imagine what we want with the little birds. But of course we have to shoot them.

May 9.—We took a set of Western Golden-crowned Kinglet this morning. We took the whole thing: female bird, nest (part of tree attached), and seven fresh eggs. How would you like to have that to stick away in the corner of your cabinet? The nest was found by Littlejohn about ten days ago while we were looking for a sparrow's nest. It was right on the beach on the south side limbs of a fir tree. The nest is the prettiest that I have ever seen and was well hid, the green moss of which it was composed blending with the green leaves. The nest was semipensile and was about twelve feet up. The eggs are peculiar. They are about the size of Bushtit's but are longer drawn out. The ground color is a creamy white and near the middle there is a well defined wreath of fine golden specks. There are lots of the Sitka Kinglets here too, and when we have more time we hope to find one of their nests.

Mr. Littlejohn got a male White-winged Crossbill the other day. They are evidently breeding now and are very shy and stay way up high. I had to climb about 80 feet the other day to get one that had been shot and lodged. We are getting lots of new waders now but the mammals seem about played out so we are working at Miss Alexander's suggestion on *birds*.

Mole Harbor, Admiralty Island, Alaska; June 2, 1907.—We just got back yesterday from a trip into the interior of the island. We have been here just two

weeks and during that time I have spent but about three nights in camp. Miss Alexander has hired a man by the name of Al Hasselborg to go with us. He is an accurate observer and possesses a great deal of local knowledge of the islands and is altogether the best woodsman that I have ever seen. He had spent some time prospecting in the interior of the island and had found three lakes, two small and one large one; but he had no boat so could not tell how large they were or where their outlets were. The first lake is about four or five miles due west of Mole Harbor. The second one is really just a continuation of the first and together they are about $3\frac{1}{2}$ or four miles long and very deep, as in some places a 100-ft. line would not touch the bottom 100 yards off shore. These two lakes are connected by a rapid stream and a 30-foot waterfall with the large lake, which is also very deep.

We packed the canoe up to the first lake and then packed up some grub and made camp for a few days. There were lots of beaver signs and cutting all around the lake and about 10 o'clock one morning when we were out in the canoe, a beaver came swimming around a bend and dove. When he came up again I began shooting at him with the rifle. I missed the first three times but the fourth shot just cut thru the skull between his eyes. He was evidently young and foolish and had been out late and was just going home or else I wouldn't have got him; because a beaver is nobody's fool I can tell you. An old wise one would put a coyote way back in the infant class. The lake's shore is very irregular and on many of the small points you can see little padded-down places in the grass at the water's edge where a beaver sits and chews the bark off of sticks. Usually there is a little pile of sticks from half to two inches in diameter and six inches to two feet long lying about. These are peeled and that makes them conspicuous. When eating the beaver squats and hunches himself up and then takes the stick in his fore paws and keeps twisting it round and round while he nips the bark off. One reminded me very much of a hungry man attacking a roasting ear of corn. They cut canals back into the woods for 50 feet or so, sometimes, so as to get back to the spruce trees. They prefer the willow, but as that is only found in a few favored localities most of them cut down small spruce trees. If no spruce is handy they will sometimes eat crabapple, huckleberry, and, as a last resort, alder. In the big lake, where there was a large stream coming in, we found a number of fine dams. Some of these dams were at least 100 yards long and in places four or five feet high. These formed a reservoir covering several acres. Above this dam there was a series of other dams; so taking it all together it was the dammedest creek I ever saw. I think that the beavers show their greatest engineering skill in the way that they divide the water so as to keep all the dams full and water-ways full between them. They fix the dams so that there is just a little water running over all the way along so that it does not wash out anywhere.

Most of the beavers lived in the holes in the bank, but others built houses. These houses resemble mammoth woodrat houses, as they are six feet high and 10 or 12 feet across at the base. The poorer ones were just a pile of saplings and sticks thrown together while the better ones looked as tho some one had shoveled mud on them. As many as six or eight beavers may live together in one house. They begin to come out of their houses about 6 o'clock in the evening and stay out until 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning. They are very shy and if an old one sees you he hunches himself up and brings his tail down with a pop on the water and you think that some one shot close by. If you bother them much they will leave and move to some other locality.

We have secured six specimens so far, all males. They are all very dark seal brown, almost black. There are a number back there and yet every one says that

there are no beaver on the islands, so we hope that it is something new. One specimen was 41 inches long and weighed 35 pounds. Another one was shot and stunned, and when Hasselborg went to pull him into the canoe the rascal came to and gave a big jerk and capsized the canoe. Hasselborg had to save the camera from going down so the beaver got away. If we had used the kodak less we would have had lots more skins.

We went up to the head of the lake and soon located three bears up among the alders on the mountain side above us. We had no grub and hadn't had any for a day, so we didn't have energy enough to climb the mountain. We went back to the first lake and about 5 o'clock Littlejohn and I started to go down to camp. It began to rain and the clouds came down so that we could scarcely see the tree tops. The huckleberry and the devilsclub had leafed out wonderfully in the few days that we had been over there and the first thing we knew we were off the trail. We tried to get back but couldn't. Then we tried to climb one of the low rolling hills to see if we could see out and tell where we were. After we had climbed several hills it began to get dark and we started for what we thought was Mole Harbor, but it was not long until we found that we were going round and round, for we came to our old tracks.

The wind was from the southeast when we started and that was all we had to go by, as we were so sure that we couldn't miss the trail that we had left the compass behind. Well, it was funny how that wind kept changing. First it came from the southeast, then from the east, next north and then west. We were not exactly lost; we just didn't know how we came, where we were, or which way we were going! Finally I said that I was going to follow a creek down until it either came to salt water or to the lake. We stumbled along thru the devilsclub and huckleberry for miles. Then the creek went into waterfalls in a deep canyon and we had more of a time. After we had gone along for about four hours in this way we began to look around for a place to hole up for the night, as we were wet to the skin, tired to death and had had nothing to eat for 24 hours. It was so rocky that we couldn't lie down, so we had to go a little farther and just then we saw water ahead and came out on the beach right near camp! Yell?—well we tried to and couldn't, but we forgot we were tired and soon got to camp. They had just got a fresh supply of grub from Juneau, and we soon had our clothes changed and sat down, and then I found I couldn't eat! I'd choke every time I tried to swallow, but I managed to get a cup of cocoa down, read a letter and crawl into bed.

When I tried to get up the next morning I promptly fell over and lay there a while. I lay around for two days kind of dazed and kept wanting to walk, walk all the time. Now I keep a compass chained to me all the time but expect to get lost again as Hasselborg and Stephens both had compasses the other day and still missed their way.

Several days later Hasselborg, Littlejohn, Miss Alexander and I went back again. We made camp about 6 o'clock, ate supper and then went out in the canoe to look for bear, up on the mountain side. We soon saw one feeding in a gulch and Hasselborg started up after it. Littlejohn went up the creek and Miss Alexander and I watched from the boat and motioned to Hasselborg when the bear moved. He had to climb nearly 1000 feet, but part of it was up a snow slide. He made it in 40 minutes. (It took us one hour and a half several days afterwards.) Then we heard six shots and saw the bear disappear in the alders. Pretty soon we heard a dull thump, thump, and the old bear came rolling down over the cliffs. He fell about a quarter of a mile and would have rolled clear to the lake had he not hit a log just right.

We skinned him next morning and found that four shots had hit him. He had several old scars that showed that he had fallen before, but if you would look at some of the places that they go you would not be surprised. The fur was poor but the skull was about as large as the largest we have. The next day we hunted beaver and got two beaver cubs.

The next morning Hasselborg and I started out for Ptarmigan. We climbed up a ways and it began to get steep and cliffy and we came to some terrible places where we scarcely could go at all; we often had to turn back and hunt a better place. The ravines were filled with snowslides part way up; a swift stream came down and had thawed a large cavity out at the top and had undermined and made a passage below the snow. While I was crossing one of these slides the snow gave way and I fell in. I hung onto the gun and that was all that saved me from being put into cold storage for eternity, as the slides rarely melt. The gun caught on each side of the hole and I did some pretty lively scrambling, I can tell you!

When we got up on top it began to blow and snow, but there were small patches of heather that were bare, and the snow was hard enough to walk on. As we neared the summit I saw what looked like a pigeon circling around; but pretty soon it came closer and I saw that it was a Ptarmigan. They would fly out over the mountain side and let out a rasping cackle which sounds just like some one running a nail over the teeth of a stiff comb. Then they would hover for an instant and finally swoop down and light on a rock. I only saw five, but I got three of them. They were all males still in white winter plumage (May 31). One was just beginning to get a few dark brown feathers on his head and neck. Hasselborg saw a female the day before which was mostly brown, but we walked all over every bare space near the summit without scaring any up. He also saw what must have been a *Leucosticte*, but we could not find any of them again. The Ptarmigan have a black line thru the eye and are comparatively small so I suppose that they are Rock Ptarmigan. Hasselborg says that there are some here that have an entirely white head in the winter and are larger, so I guess the Willow must be here too. We had a hard time getting down the mountain and came to a place where we crawled down some alders and hung on to some twigs and peeked over. There was a 75-foot cliff below us and we had to go a mile to get around it. I started to slip in one place and grabbed a sharp rock that tore a big hole in the side of my hand, but I had to grab something or I would have gone clear down to the lake.

We saw two immense bears up on the mountain side but they were in a place that we could not climb to. It is surprising where they can go. They are big and heavy but they can go lots of places where a man can't.

I was looking over your "Special Desiderata." We are trying to make a big hole in it. Have the Ptarmigan, four pairs of grouse, and a pair with nest and set of eggs of Sharp-shinned Hawk. Saw a pair of Redtails but could not get them. Stephens and Hasselborg are up to the lakes now and I think that they will get some *Leucostictes*.

We saw several Townsend Warblers over at Windfall Harbor, but none here. Varied Thrushes are quite common here but are hard to get. We have everything that you got at Sitka (of the land birds) except eight species. In addition we have White-winged Crossbill, Northern Redbreasted Sapsucker, Pine Siskin, Myrtle Warbler, Redbreasted Nuthatch, and possibly some others that I do not remember without looking them up.

Miss Alexander is going to Juneau in a day or two to see what has become of our launch. We have been waiting for it for over a month now but the weather has been bad. Our next stopping place will be Red Bluff Bay on Baranof Island.

Miss Alexander, Hasselborg and I are going to go down the river from the lakes to Kootznahoo Inlet. If we can do this we will have crossed the island almost in the middle. Miss Alexander does not ask us to do anything that she would not do herself, but it takes a pretty good one to follow her. Well I must get to work on my notes now, so will have to let up for this time.

Hooniah, Chichagof Island, Alaska; June 20, 1907.—We just got here today and got our mail. We left Red Bluff Bay on Baranof yesterday and came up to Fresh water Bay and anchored last night. Then we came back to Hooniah to store our gasoline and some provisions.

Miss Alexander, Mr. Hasselborg and I left Mole Harbor, on the east side of Admiralty, on June 11 for a trip across the island to Kootznahoo Inlet and Killisnoo. We got thru all right but we had quite a trip. We were a little over two days going from Mole Harbor to Killisnoo. The total distance that we traveled was about thirty miles.

I saw lots of birds going down the river, several of which I couldn't recognize. I broke my paddle trying to stop to get one and it seemed as tho they were near swift places in the river where we couldn't stop. One place we had to portage around a waterfall and rapids for about a mile and a half and it was pretty tough. Shooting the rapids was all right but it would have been all off with us if we had hit a rock. The tide rips and rapids in Kootznahoo Inlet are worse than the rapids in the river, when the tide is running out.

I found a Duck Hawk's nest at Danger Point just above Killisnoo as we came down and I went back later and got the female and three downy young, about a week old. The nest was under a clump of alder roots about 100 feet above the breakers on a limestone cliff. The young ones were hungry, so I chucked them into the fish basket and brought them along. They are regular pigs and eat greedily five times a day. They have almost doubled in weight in a week. We have some good photos of them already and if they thrive, as they give every promise of doing, we will get a whole life series of them "a la Finley." I have had lots of fun with them. A sea voyage just improves their appetite.

While we were crossing the island the rest of the party went on down to Red Bluff Bay and made camp. While they were unloading they got too much in the skiff and when Littlejohn's 225 pounds listed a little, the boat capsized with our collecting chests, note books, etc. Stephens slipped just as he was carrying his chest ashore and got a lot of his plates and photographic material wet. That night the tide took a crazy notion to call on them and the next morning their cornmeal, sugar, etc., was wet. They had cautioned *us* to be careful!

Glacier Bay, Alaska; July 4, 1907.—Well, this is the "Glorious Fourth," and it is raining here so that I haven't been able to stick my head out all morning. Have been trying to straighten out accounts with my neglected note book this morning. It is a good thing that we have a rainy day once in a while or my note book would be more neglected than it is.

There are lots of things here. This is the first place we have struck that we have found enough to keep us busy. The tent is full of specimens and they don't dry readily either. I counted up last night and found that we had 628 birds and mammals (332 birds and 296 mammals). I think that this should be very gratifying to the "bird fiend." I have preferred land birds to water birds but sometimes there was little choice. Well, I must go out and "lassoo" an iceberg and tow it in so we can have some ice cream for dinner, and I'll finish this later.

Ice cream was all right, but Littlejohn had to sit under an umbrella while he ground it out.

When we were at Hooniah we all went up on the mountain (2600 feet) and I staid over night and trapped while Hasselborg went bear hunting and Stephens and Littlejohn came back to camp. Stephens got one Ptarmigan. It was a male about one half winter and one half summer plumage. Stephens flushed him from a clump of scrub hemlock near the summit. I saw one the next morning about three o'clock, but he was whizzing off down the mountain side. They were very conspicuous and consequently lying low. We didn't get any more.

I saw several *Leucostictes* and had two good shots at one but failed to get him. It was about four o'clock in the morning and I was about froze. I saw others but couldn't get to them as they were on rock slides among cliffs that I couldn't hang on to.

I had a waterproof (?) canvass but there was nothing to make a fire out of and it snowed and blew that night. My canvass leaked, I got wet and almost froze to death. I caught cold in the side of my head and was laid up for a week afterwards with an ulcerated tooth and you know I'm worse than useless when I have the toothache! And when I was laid up here a bear had to come along and I couldn't get out to join in the killing.

Well, I got two big *Microtus* (178 and 175 mm.) and two shrews in my traps, and hunted from three o'clock in the morning till about eight; then I started down. I got off the trail on the way down and was climbing around in a big patch of windfalls when a bird hopped up and sat on a log and looked at me. I saw that it was something new to me and that it was exactly what Hasselborg had seen the day before. Well, I got him and concluded that it was a pine grosbeak! Well, I got three males and three females before I got out. I only saw nine birds, but thought I would take all that came handy. One male was in the bright red plumage. They were all in breeding condition but they are hard things to put up. I see that Bailey says the Alaska Pine Grosbeak is restricted to the interior. What would this be apt to be?

We packed up the next day and came over here just north of Bartlet Cove. The Indians came over one morning early and said that their dogs were after a bear. Hasselborg and Littlejohn went with them and after chasing around thru the woods for about an hour, in which they had separated, they finally came onto the bear in a thicket of alders. The bear charged upon them and the Indian that had a gun turned and ran without shooting. The other Indian had no gun so he started too. Littlejohn was at the tail end and saw the Indians and the bear coming. He sneaked behind a tree and shot the bear thru the shoulders just as she was reaching out to grab the Indian. The bear turned around and it took three more shots to finish her. She had a cub which they got; the dogs had been worrying her all night so she was "red hot." It was a brown bear about five feet, eight inches long and the fur has faded to a dirty yellow on the back. Hasselborg has killed four bears since he has been with us. He had two coming at him at once on Chichagof. It took three shots to kill one and five to stop the other, and when he quit he only had two shells left. They were male and female, and this is the breeding season; so that was evidently what made them so ugly.

Yesterday we tried to go up to the bird islands about fifteen miles from here. They are right in front of Muir Glacier. It is throwing out so much ice that we couldn't get to the islands, but will try again later. We got out and the fog came down so that we couldn't see where we were and got caught in an eddy. The ice began to pack and we almost lost the canoe before we knew it. We finally got to

where the ice was so thick that we couldn't get thru at all, and I almost froze before we got out. There were lots of cormorants sitting on the ice which reminded me very much of that plate of the Pelagic Cormorant in Bailey's "Hand-Book."

Marbled and Kittlitz Murrelets are common here but we can not find their breeding ground, and judging from birds we got they have either bred some time ago or are just going too.

My Duck Hawks are great pets and are growing rapidly. They come into the tent and beg for bodies now, and they have a tremendous appetite. One gained two ounces a day for four days, and is doing better now.

July 8.—We went up to the island on the 5th. Glaucous-winged Gulls Pigeon Guillemots, and Pelagic Cormorants were breeding on the island.

The Muir Glacier has retreated on account of an earthquake four or five years ago until the face of it is about twice its former size. The discharge of ice is at least twice as great and the Marble Islands are right in front of the glacier so that they have ice floating thickly about them all the time. This change in temperature has evidently had a noticeable effect on the nesting of the birds on the islands. The cold has evidently driven them elsewhere as we found lots of signs that showed that the birds had formerly bred there abundantly; the Indians haven't exterminated them because they can't get there on account of the floating ice. A few Tufted and Horned Puffins were nesting in crevices in the rocks. I thought that I had got the "Old Boy" himself when I shot one of those Horned Puffins and I was sure of it when it grabbed hold of me with that "tin-shears" beak. We saw a pair of Parasitic Jaegers chasing a Duck Hawk about the islands. Several species of land birds were seen. Townsend Sparrows breed as also do Alaska Hermit Thrushes. Saw also Savanna Sparrow, Least Sandpiper and Barn Swallow. The Pelagic Cormorants were just beginning to lay, as I saw four nests with one egg in each. They make a particularly groaning sound when on the nest that sounds like some one moaning in pain. We could hear it quite a ways out before we landed and couldn't imagine what it was.

I took in three adult Pelagic Cormorants as they were in fine breeding plumage. They were pretty tough to put up but not nearly so bad as the Horned Puffins. I got five Kittlitz Murrelets on the way, so I haven't been idle since I got back.

We will probably spend ten days or so on the other side of the bay and then go out on the outside of Chichagof near Cross Sound. I suppose that will be about the end of my collecting as I expect to leave Juneau for Stanford about August 10.

CATALOG OF BIRDS COLLECTED BY W. W. BROWN, JR., IN MIDDLE LOWER CALIFORNIA

By JOHN E. THAYER and OUTRAM BANGS

FROM the autumn of 1906 until the spring of 1907 Mr. W. W. Brown, Jr., was engaged in collecting in Lower California in the interests of the Thayer Museum at Lancaster, Massachusetts. During this period his headquarters were at San Quintin, from which place he made excursions into the surrounding country.