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A GLIMPSE OF SURF-BIRDS

By WILLIAM LEON DAWSON

WITH SIX PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

WHAT we do *not* know about the Surf-bird (*Aphriza virgata*) would fill one of those dummy rows (entitled "The Complete Works of Xanadu") in a Wernicke bookcase. Disguise it as modestly as you will, if you have ever seen one you contrive to let your friends know of it the first day, and you fall to wondering the day after whether that Surf-bird story wouldn't bear repeating. Anyhow, I'd had my luck last fall, when three of a flock of five fell before our impulsive guns—better luck than I deserved, for while Howell exulted (really, you know, he yelled like a Comanche), I sat on the wet sand and hated myself for having used a gun instead of the camera—an unpardonable lapse into barbarism!

But coals of fire were heaped upon my head when on the 3rd of May last I thrust it cautiously over the crest of the beach bluff at La Patera, near Santa Barbara, California, and saw on a nearby reef, not a mere handful, but a large company of mingled shags and Surf-birds. The cormorants rose hurriedly and after them the Aphrizids, but the latter settled again while we accomplished a long detour which brought us up, panting, behind a line of rocks substantially on a level with our prizes. I snapped hurriedly at 150 feet, then set out more carefully to make a series of photographic approaches. First, I crept on hands and knees across the upper beach to a jutting rock which offered a little shelter; then advanced by slow stages in a direct line. What matter though the sand was wet and plastered here and there with blobs of crude oil! Were they not Surf-birds! Ever and again I snapped. At the sixty-foot range a jealous wave engulfed me as I squatted Turk-fashion upon the sands. No matter. It would not do to put the cause to hazard, by rising. "Snap" went the latch, and "roar" went the shut-

ter till the first relay of plates, carried in the game pocket of an old hunting coat, was exhausted.

Retracing my steps as cautiously as I had come, I secured another batch of

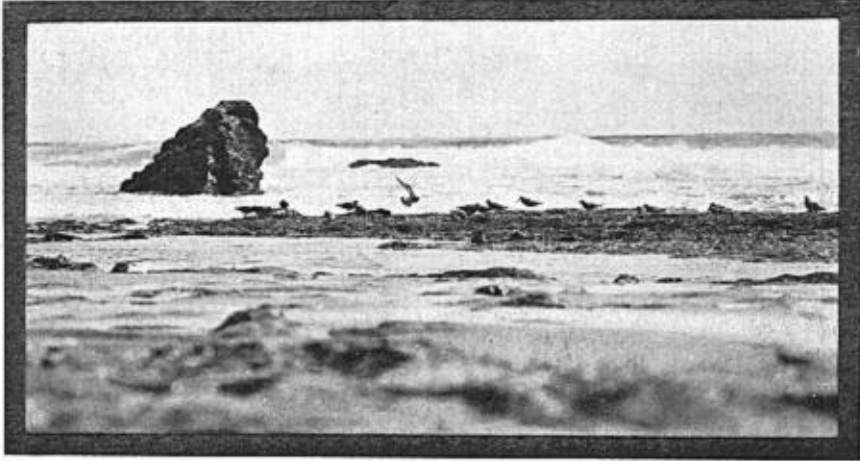


Fig. 2. SURF-BIRDS: THE FIRST EXPOSURE

plates and returned to the fray. This time I succeeded in reaching the reef itself and in lessening the distance to some forty feet—a score of Surf-birds at forty feet! They rose at length, for there were timorous souls among them, but they



Fig. 3. SURF-BIRDS IN FLIGHT; ONLY THE BLACK TURNSTONE REMAINS
From a photograph, copyright, 1913, by W. L. Dawson

returned or ever I had reached the base of supplies. After a hasty cold lunch of bread-and-butter, omelette and cake, all sugared impartially with fine sand, I resumed the quest, pausing only to note that the Surf-birds were themselves busily

engaged in feeding upon the white barnacles which covered the reef. These seemed to form their exclusive diet for the time; and it was interesting to see a bird get a good grip on a reluctant cirriped, then brace and haul him out by main force. It was yeoman service, and many a bill was smeared with bug juice, not to mention "biramous cirri" and other delicate crustacean apparatus.

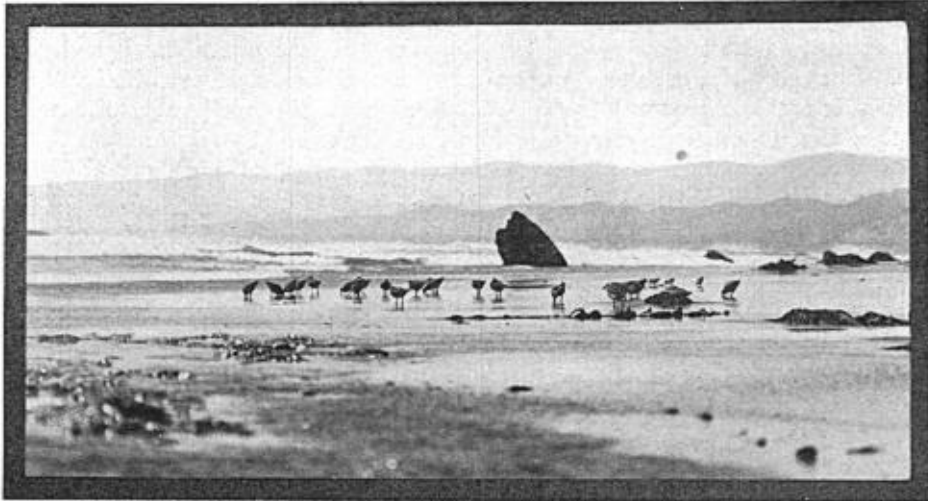


Fig. 4. SURF-BIRDS: A SANDPIPER POSE
From a photograph, copyright, 1913, by W. L. Dawson

There were about twenty of the birds, twenty-three to be exact, and one Black Turnstone kept with them most of the time, although he might have found plenty of his own kind not far away. Once the Surf-birds deserted him and left him trembling on the rock; but I was unprepared to utilize the superb pose which his lonely plight presented a moment later, and he made off with startled cries.

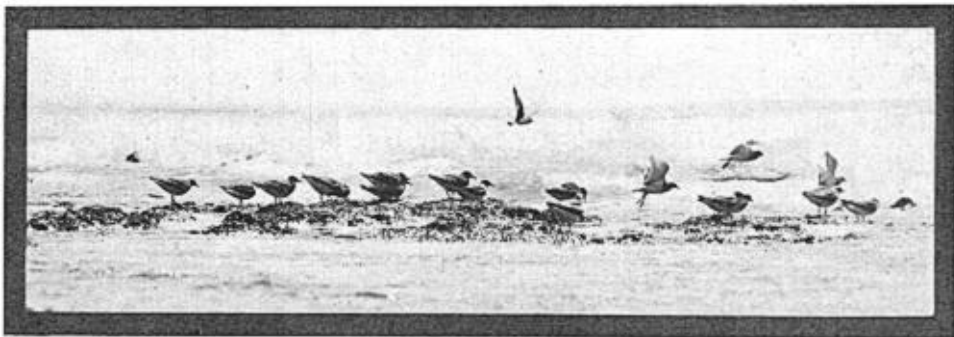


Fig. 5. SURF-BIRDS: SHIFTING
From a photograph, copyright, 1913, by W. L. Dawson

As for the Surf-birds, as often as they were dislodged they retired to a strip of sand a few rods away and fell to gleaning like pipers.

On my last sally from the base of supplies I was determined to press advantage home. The gulls, who would fain have occupied the reef themselves, shrieked warnings when they saw me advancing upon the unsophisticated Surf-

birds. The latter gave attention indeed, but would not heed the repeated warnings. My advances had the effect of bringing all the flock together, whereas otherwise they would have scattered over the entire ledge of, say, a hundred feet length. Now and again the flock shifted, but always they came back, alighting at the extreme tip of the reef where the waves frequently bandied them. For the most part they fed silently, but as often as I made some unusual demonstration or as often as the wave swept about them, a murmur of complaint arose. The flock came to attention, or a few shifted position, if the water was actually too deep. But the moment danger was over, work was resumed upon the barnacles.

My last exposure, the last of twenty-one plates, was made at a distance of eighteen feet, and at that range only half of the flock would go on the plate. The exposure (f. 16, 1-140) was perfectly timed, and it marked, I am proud to confess, the most thrilling moment of a ten-year experience in bird photography.

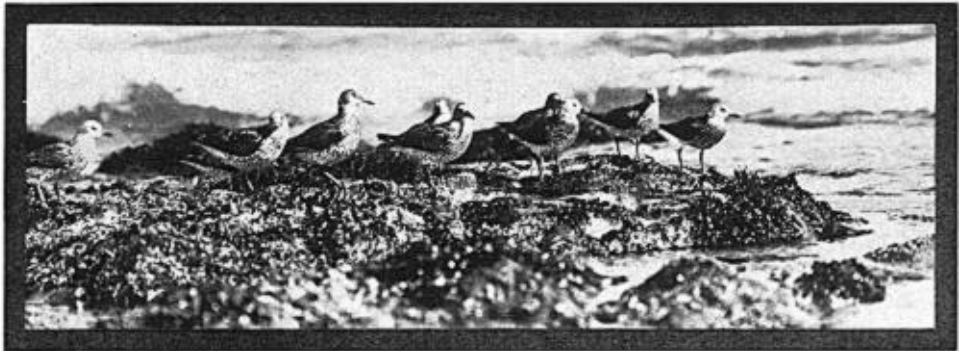


Fig. 6. SURF-BIRDS: THE PARTING SHOT
From a photograph, copyright, 1913, by W. L. Dawson

CONCEALING AND REVEALING COLORATION OF ANIMALS*

By JUNIUS HENDERSON

CONCEALMENT is only one factor of safety and not always the most important factor. There are numerous others, such as the sharp hearing, keen scent and speed of deer and antelopes, the weapons and strength of elephants and tigers, the protective armor of turtles and armadillos, the shells of clams and oysters, the spines of sea urchins and porcupines, the offensive or irritative secretions or stench of certain invertebrates, which render concealment comparatively unimportant in many cases.

Natural selection means the survival, not of those forms which have a single advantageous character, but of those whose combined characters as a whole best fit them for existence in their natural environment, surrounded by their natural enemies. Hence the very popular supposition that under the doctrine of natural selection all animals must be concealingly colored, is unwarranted in theory and unsupported by the facts. If a given species be varying in the direction of concealing coloration and in no other direction, naturally those forms, or mutants, or whatever we wish to call them, whose colors are in closest harmony, would be

* Abstract of an address before the University of Colorado Scientific Society.