

THE CONDOR A MAGAZINE OF WESTERN ORNITHOLOGY.



Volume XVIII

March-April, 1916

Number 2

SEA GULLS AT THE PANAMA-PACIFIC INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION

By JOSEPH MAILLIARD

WITH TWENTY-ONE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

SAN FRANCISCO BAY has long been known as a favorite wintering place for sea gulls, and several species are well represented upon its waters from early fall to late spring. In the course of years many individuals, of some of the larger varieties especially, have partially lost their natural fear of man, or perhaps it would be better to say have been greatly attracted by the feasts that mankind offers them, and have allowed their appetites to overcome their dread. Flocks of these gulls have been in the habit of following the various ferry and river boats on the bay (fig. 2) for the purpose of feeding upon the refuse thrown overboard from the lunch counters and restaurants, and some have grown so tame that they will not only endeavor to catch bits of bread thrown to them by passengers but have had so much practice that they are quite often successful when the bread is tossed high enough into the air (fig. 3). Occasionally one bolder than the rest will take a morsel from an outstretched hand.

The fishing boats that daily pass in and out of the Golden Gate frequently throw overboard old bait, or the cleanings of fish, and on such occasions are followed by clouds of clamorous gulls, so numerous that they look, at a distance, like a swarm of bees. "Fishermen's Wharf", set apart for the use of the fishing boats, has long been a favorite gathering ground for these scavengers of the sea. In stormy or threatening weather it is a common sight in San Francisco to see gulls, singly or in flocks, sailing overhead, gracefully breasting the breeze, or flying across the peninsula from bay to ocean; while in cultivated fields near the bay they are often to be found following the plow and gathering the fat angle-worms turned up in the moist soil. So the gulls have not been strangers to San Francisco's people. But it was not until last fall

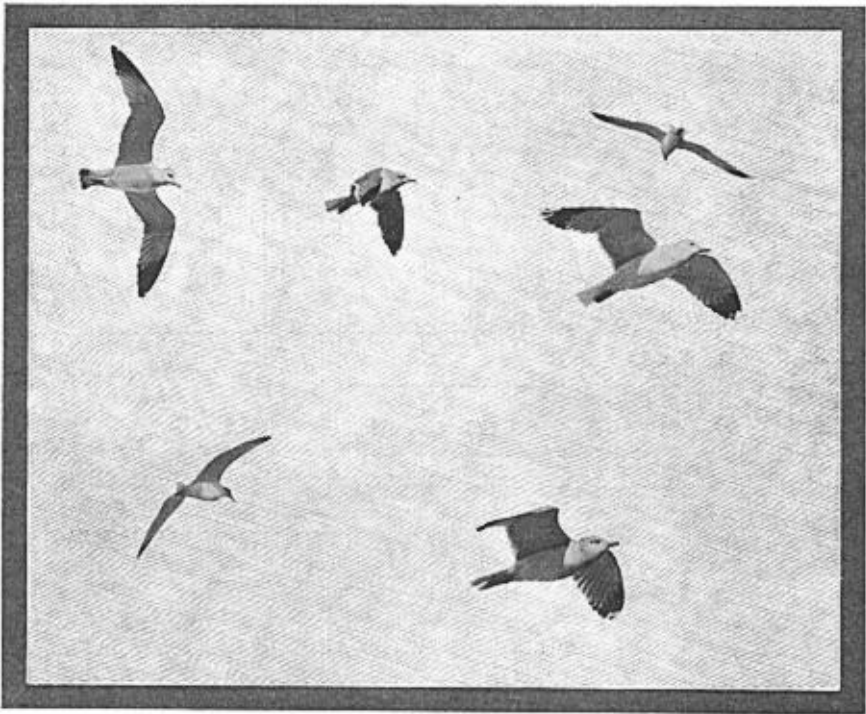


Fig. 2. GULLS AS SEEN FROM FERRY BOAT ON SAN FRANCISCO BAY



Fig. 3. FERRY PASSENGER FEEDING GULLS

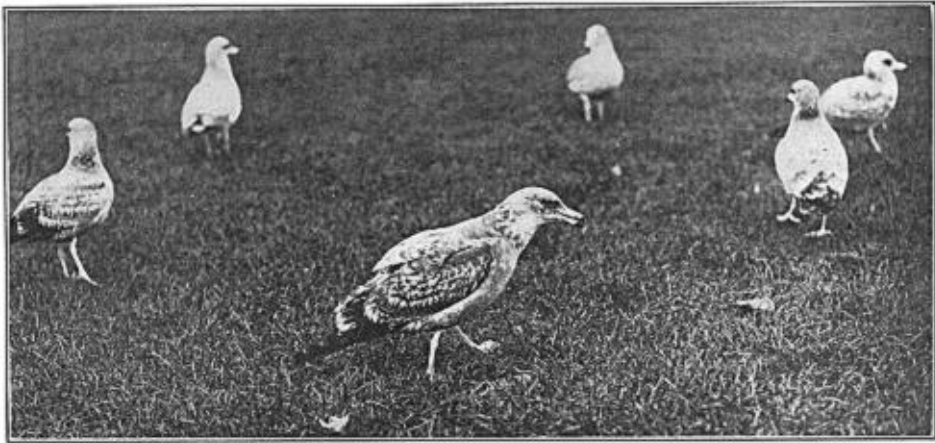


Fig. 4. GULLS LOOKING FOR FOOD ON EXPOSITION LAWN



Fig. 5. EARLY ON THE GROUND

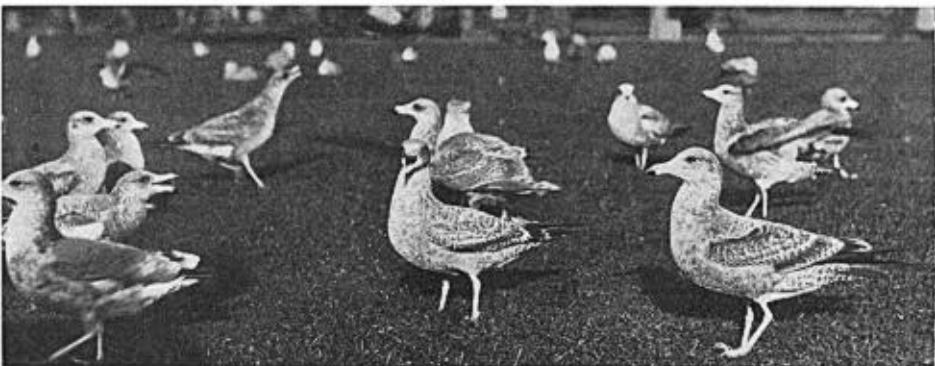


Fig. 6. BIRDS CALLING FOR FOOD

(1915) that the acquaintance ripened into intimacy, and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition was the means of bringing this about.

In the winter of 1914-15, when the lawns of the Exposition grounds were first laid out along the marina, and grass started upon them, it was remarked that flocks of gulls had been attracted thereby and had seized upon these open level spots as fine places to congregate and sun themselves, possibly finding some scraps from workmen's lunch baskets as a pleasing addition to their customary rations (fig. 4). But the matter ended there for that season, the birds drifting away to their breeding places as spring approached. Upon their return last fall, however, to take possession of their new sunning grounds and

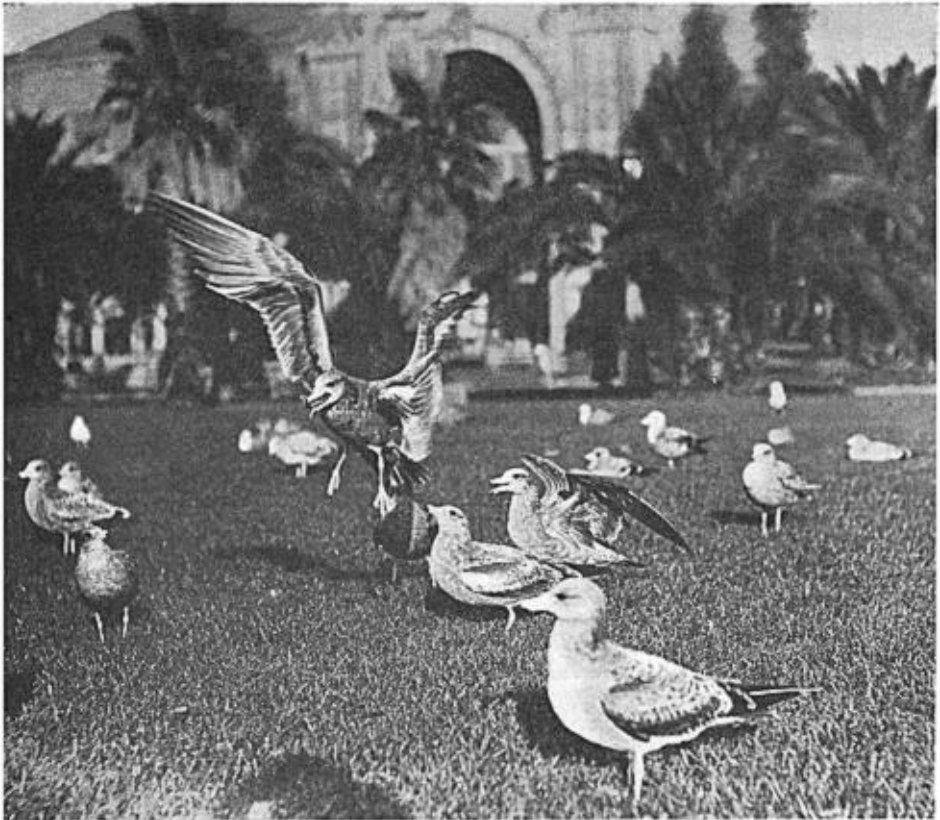


Fig. 7. BIRD ON WING IN ACT OF CATCHING PIECE OF BREAD TOSSED TO IT

the fine fresh water ponds they had so delighted in bathing in during the past winter, they found a great change had taken place. The buildings which they had stolidly watched in the making had grown into a marvelous city of beauty and grace, and it was peopled by throngs of human beings. These remarkable beings brought with them food, more food than they could eat, often leaving a goodly share upon the lawns and in many places. At first a few gulls found these gleanings in the early mornings, before the people came, and hastened to feast undisturbed (fig. 5). The news of the feasting spread far and wide, and as the hosts arrived from the rapidly freezing north they joined the earlier arrivals and assisted in the enjoyment of such good things, growing more

bold, paying but scant attention to mankind, and even going so far as to clamor to be fed (figs. 6, 7).

From the first the laguna by the Fine Arts Palace had been a favorite bathing place for the gulls. This beautiful body of water was appreciated as well by some other varieties of waterfowl, among which were some Coots, some Ruddy Ducks, a Surf Scoter, a Scaup Duck, and an occasional stray duck or two of other varieties which would drop in from time to time. There were also tame ducks and some semi-domesticated wild geese on this laguna, but none of these seemed to interfere in any way with the repose or enjoyment of the gulls except in the way of an occasional "scrap" between them and the geese or coots over some bit of food (fig. 8). The gulls, however, mostly congregated by themselves, their numbers varying with the day and hour. At



Fig. 8. GULLS, COOTS AND DUCKS ON LAGUNA OF PALACE OF FINE ARTS

times the laguna would be swarming with them, while a constant succession could be seen approaching from various directions, with as many leaving or merely rising on wing and soaring about only to settle down again. At times the birds seemed to be in quiescent mood and satisfied with calm repose, while at others the scene would be a busy one, with bathing, ducking under of heads, and preening of feathers going on in all directions (fig. 9).

As the gulls grew fat they grew more saucy, and finally took possession of the whole outdoor portion of the exhibition, bathing in any or all of the fountains, even in the small ones inside the smaller courts, roosting around among the benches, occupying the walks and barely moving out of people's way. It actually seemed as if they moved—and then with an air of injured

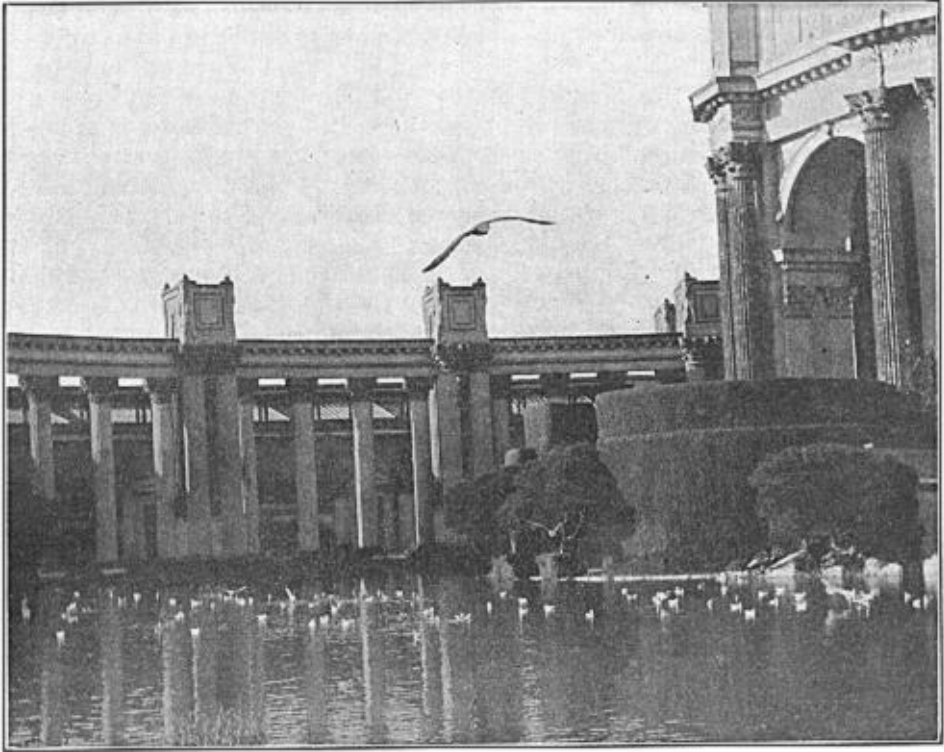


Fig. 9. GULLS ON LAGUNA, PALACE OF FINE ARTS

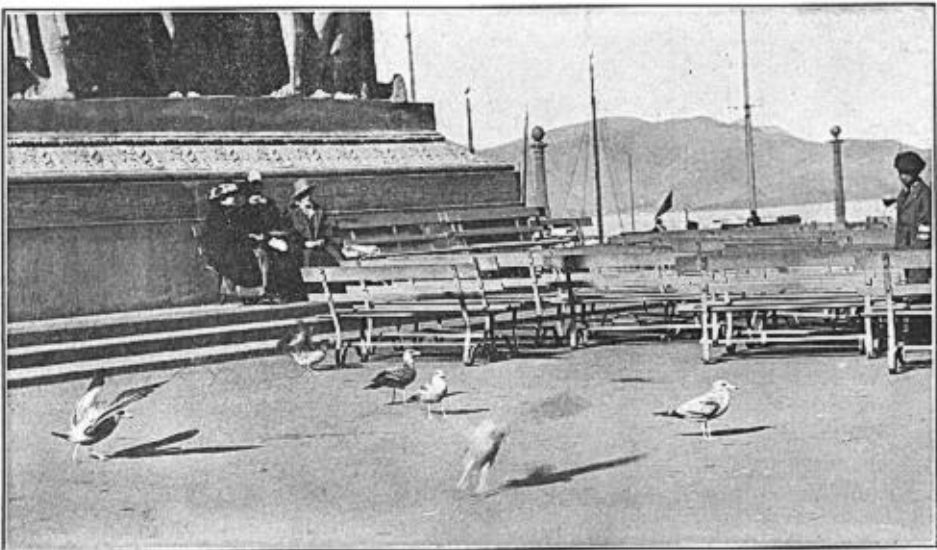


Fig. 10. WAITING FOR SCRAPS OF LUNCH

innocence—only to avoid being stepped upon! (See figs. 10, 11.) As confidence increased between the feathered and the human visitors to the Exposition, many people grew interested in watching and feeding the gulls, and many efforts were made to get them to eat from a person's hand; but when it came to close contact, a certain wariness was always exhibited, and while stories of such confidence were circulated the writer neither saw nor succeeded in bringing about such an instance. In fact, even when a person would remain perfectly still in a sitting position for a good while at a time, it was hard to induce one of the birds to pick up a piece of bread nearer than a couple of feet away from one's own feet (figs. 12, 13, 14).

Strange to say, the first comers in the fall seemed to be almost all immature birds, and a large proportion of them appeared to be birds of the year, as they were in the immature mottled plumage with none of the pearl gray or plumbeous tints showing in the mantles. Later on, older birds seemed more numerous, and toward midwinter the proportion of adults increased greatly. About the middle of November, at the time the writer first noticed the arrival

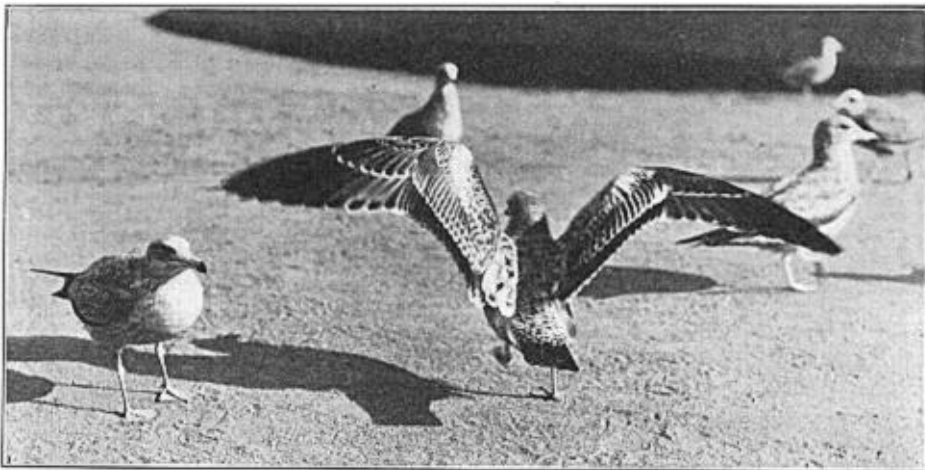


Fig. 11. GETTING OUT OF THE WAY

of the gulls on the Exposition grounds, few but Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) were to be seen. Later on, an occasional Western Gull (*Larus occidentalis*), or California Gull (*Larus californicus*), appeared among the smaller variety, though it was impossible to say which was which of the two latter species on account of the difficulty in distinguishing immature birds on short notice when one cannot examine the subjects intimately. Still later, in December, appeared the Glaucous-winged Gull (*Larus glaucescens*), easily discernible by its larger size and different markings, and an occasional Glaucous Gull (*Larus hyperboreus*) mingled with the throng, most of these still being in immature plumage but with the color of the adult mantle showing to a greater or less extent. No adult Glaucous Gull was distinguished, but careful study of two or three individuals in immature plumage on different occasions led to the conclusion that the subject under consideration belonged to this species. Upon one of these occasions Walter K. Fisher, of Stanford University, accompanied the writer and concurred in such an opinion.

The Herring Gull did not seem to participate in the general enjoyment



Fig. 12. HUNGRY, BUT A BIT SHY

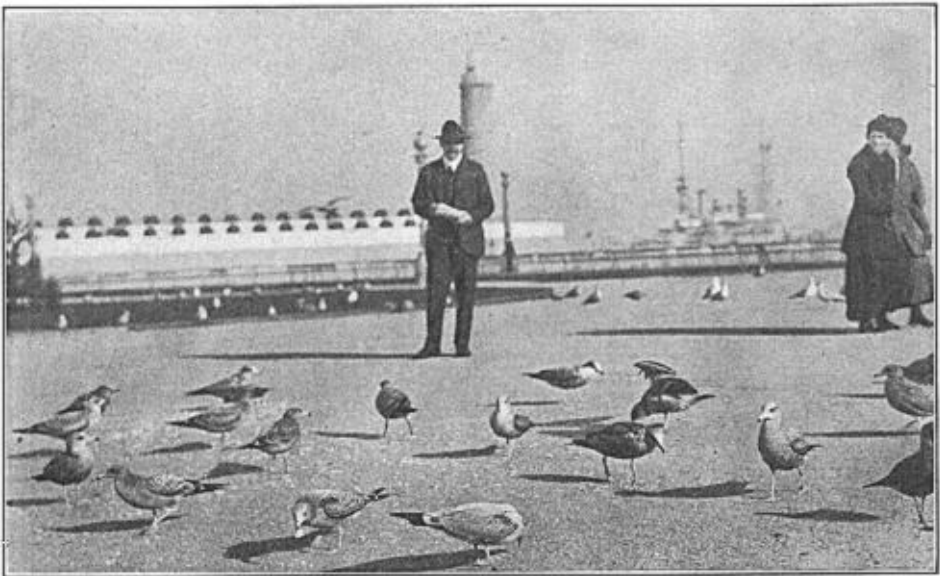


Fig. 13. A CRACKER FESTIVAL.

of the Exposition offerings, or, if it was there, was inconspicuous among the other species; and while the Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*) was abundant along the actual water line on the edge of the marina it never seemed to care for anything that looked like dry land, as none was identified among the groups that penetrated inland even to a few yards from the water. The Bonaparte Gull was entirely absent from the scene. As far as the Short-billed Gull is concerned this is rather singular, for the reason that this bird is numerous all along the shore line, hovering just above the water's edge where the wavelets cast their flotsam along the northern boundary of the Exposition grounds, and yet never drifting landward with the other gulls to partake of the bounties there provided.

The large area of the marina, close to the water's edge, was evidently a most attractive spot for the gulls, and at times the grassy lawn was densely peopled with them (figs. 15, 16). Strange to say, while the gulls were only moderately timid in the presence of man, and while they must have been accustomed to the booming of surf and the thundering of huge waves, they were very slow about getting used to the noises made by automobiles, auto-trucks, and the racket of the little steam train that ran along the marina. In fact even a passing horse-drawn vehicle would make a whole flock take suddenly to wing, when the birds would hover about for a short time and settle down again (figs. 17, 18). Toward the close of the Exposition more calmness prevailed and finally the flocks of gulls grouped upon the green-sward would remain quiet even when the little steam train rattled, chugged and whistled its way along the very edge of their temporary camping ground (fig. 19).

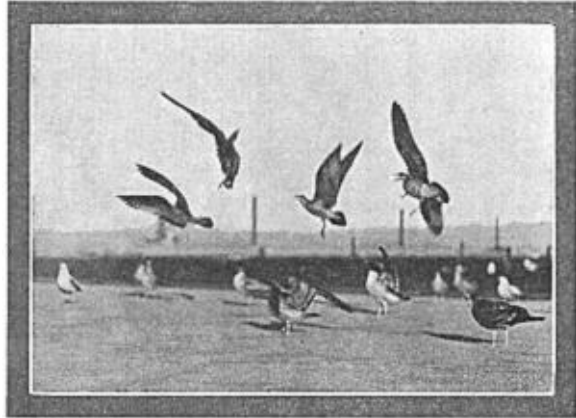


Fig. 14. CATCHING BREAD ON THE FLY; A STUDY IN ATTITUDES

About the strangest scene that the writer witnessed happened one morning when he wandered into the grounds after the Exposition had closed its gates, and found men draining off the fountains and ponds and sweeping out the basins. On this occasion the basins on each side of the main entrance were being drained and men were at work sweeping up the debris that had collected on the bottoms, the water being only an inch or two deep at the deepest part. A flock of gulls was taking a great interest in the proceedings and each individual was on the lookout for some tidbit that might have before escaped attention. But scant notice was given to the laborers there at work, or to anybody passing by, the birds seeming to recognize the fact that this was their last chance at *that* bit of fresh water, anyway. The reflections in this instance were very remarkable and it is quite a puzzle to work them out in the photograph shown herewith (fig. 20).

After the closing of the Exposition the supply of food suddenly dropped, and the gulls' interest greatly waned. Workmen helped somewhat with con-

tributions from their lunch baskets, but there was nothing like the feast of heretofore. At lunch time the workmen about the courts were surrounded by a hungry horde which begrudged each mouthful that disappeared down

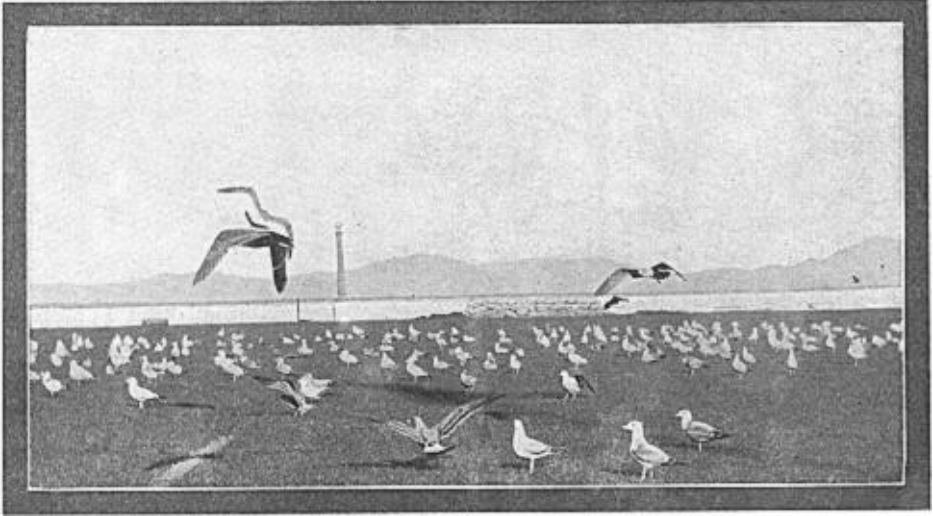


Fig. 15. GULLS CONGREGATED ON THE MARINA

human throats, and was not satisfied with the crumbs that fell to its share. Accustomed as they had grown to associating food with the presence of human beings the shortening supply at the Exposition grounds drove the gulls to the idea of following up the people, and before long the birds were to be noticed

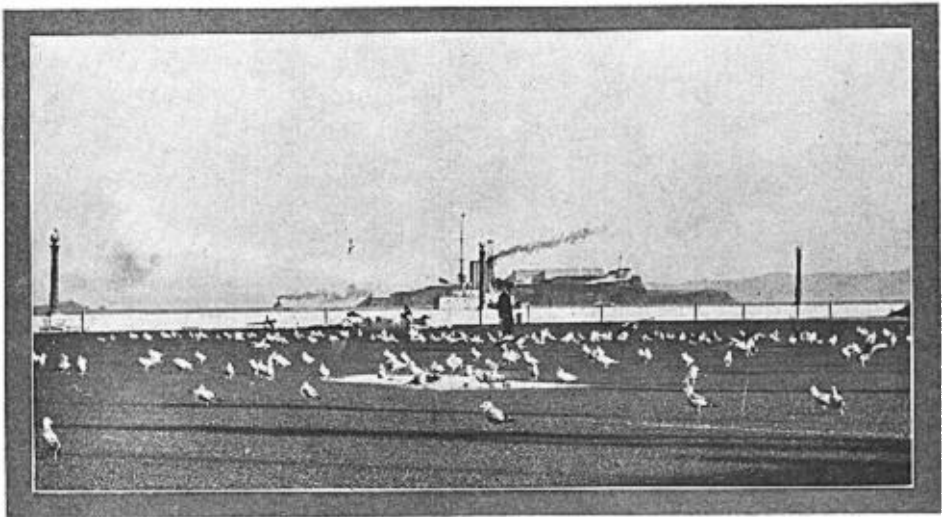


Fig. 16. A BATH IN A RAINWATER POOL

as frequent visitors to the parks which are so numerous scattered about San Francisco, where people not only shared their lunches with them but many deliberately took out household scraps to feed them. While the gulls have



Fig. 17. DISTURBED BY A PASSING VEHICLE

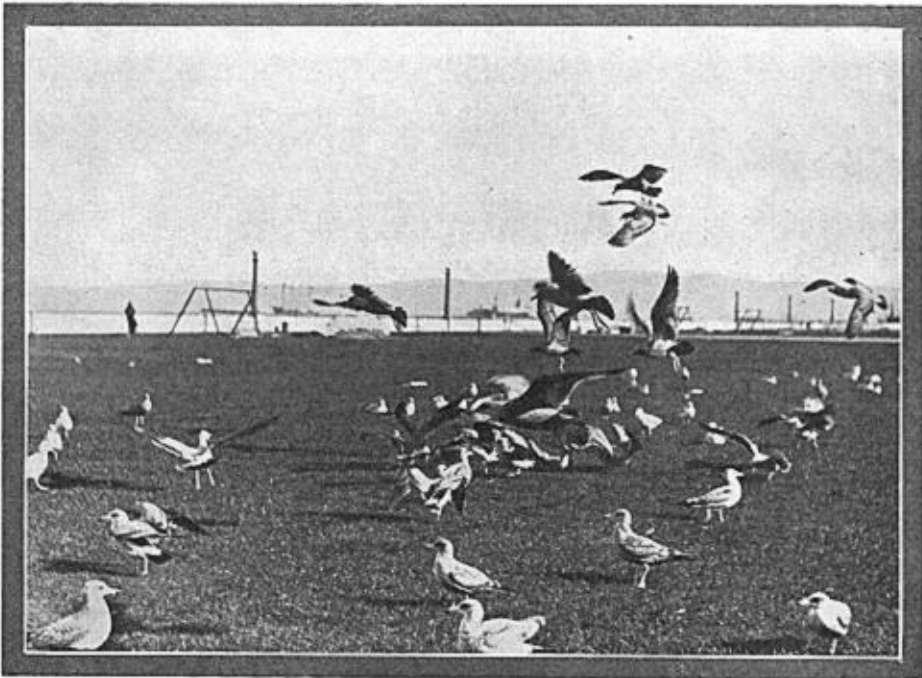


Fig. 18. TRAIN COMING

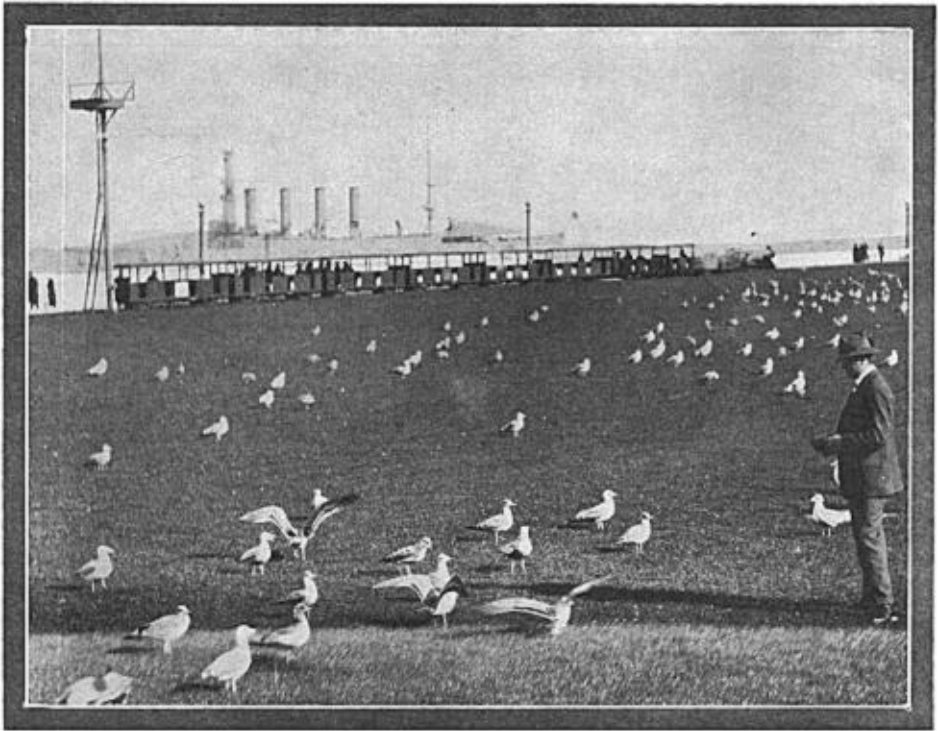


Fig. 19. GETTING USED TO THE TRAIN



Fig. 20. REFLECTIONS IN BASIN OF FOUNTAIN



Fig. 21. GULLS IN ALTA PLAZA, CLAY AND STEINER STREETS, SAN FRANCISCO



Fig. 22. A RACE FOR A PRIZE, ALTA PLAZA

scattered considerably at the time this is written (February 10, 1916) there are still a good many to be seen about vacant lots and parks in the heart of the town (figs. 21, 22).

The accompanying photographs are offered not for their worth as specimens of the art of photography, because a long series of cloudy and dull days interfered sadly with the taking of scenes that needed bright lighting to get good effects in motion, to say nothing of many mishaps that occurred, but with the hope that readers of THE CONDOR will be interested in illustrations of so rapidly achieved semi-domestication of wild birds in such an unexpected and unpremeditated manner.

San Francisco, February 10, 1916.

CHARACTERISTIC BIRDS OF THE DAKOTA PRAIRIES

IV. ON THE LAKES

By FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

FROM THE LARGER LAKES that I visited casually during the summer I brought tantalizing, confused memories of small flocks of Ducks shifting back and forth across the passes, Grebes calling across the water, Terns flying hither and thither, Black-crowned Night Herons posing before tule walls, families of Ducks trailing along the tule and cane-bordered shores, and numerous unnamable dots scattered over the surface, in one place one moment, rising and settling in another the next—tantalizing confused memories that rise compellingly again and again and make the call of North Dakota well nigh too strong to resist.

From the one short strip of open shore on Stump Lake that I was able to patrol for a few weeks, however, I brought a few pictures good to review. Foremost among them stands my first adult male Canvasback; let those to whom they are an old story recall the thrill of their first! There he sat on the water in strong sunlight, his aristocratic bill with its straight Grecian line from forehead to tip showing strikingly, his red head glowing, his white canvas back gleaming in the light. The strip of lakeshore, bare and uninteresting before, was distinguished by the sight. It could never be commonplace again. A Canvasback had been there! The solitary aristocrat appeared in the same place once more, to my great delight, so brilliant in the sun that the sight was positively thrilling.

Sometimes the friends that visited my shore line were just a pair of plain every day brownish Gadwalls, but it was none the less a pleasure to watch them and listen to their talk as they fed close in shore and then walked up on the beach together to rest, visiting with low friendly quacks. They might easily have been my friends of the pasture slough, Darby and Joan, as the lake was within easy flying distance.

A Blue-winged Teal was caught resting at the water line one day, but when approached flew swiftly away. A female Golden-eye, doubtless brooding inside some goodly hollow tree bordering the lake was watched swimming in from a distance when she was only a large white spot fronting the angle of a wake until, as she fed along the beach, her bright golden eye showed