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JUNE WITH THE BIRDS OF THE WASHINGTON COAST.

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Down the Coast to Destruction.

While we found the way to Destruction as easy and as pleasant as it has been depicted in solemn injunction to the careless youth, we are fain to declare that once arrived at the place its supposed terrors have wholly given place to delights indescribable! It is only too true that this rock, covered with a dense growth of bushes where the light keepers have not cleared it away for beautiful lawns and fertile garden spots, has been the dread of the coasting sailor in times past. It stands out boldly into the Pacific, flanked on all sides by deadly reefs and shoals. No boat larger than a small lighter can find a landing place after threading the tortuous ways among the outlying rocks.

Rain and wind, which had held us for five days at LaPush, finally abated. The trip down was uneventful save for the many new islands and rocks with their bird population, and the slightly changing fauna. We noted the gradual disappearance of the Tufted Puffin and California Murre and the presence of Pigeon Guillemot and Western Gull among the sea birds. Glaucus-winged Gulls were still numerous and apparently the only nesting gulls on the island.

Our memories of Destruction Island will be perpetually divided between the Rhinoceros Auklet, which breeds in abun-

dance there, the Black Oystercatcher, and the royal entertainment which we received at the hands of the light keepers.

The three days upon the island were devoted to the study of the nesting habits of Pigeon Guillemots, Black Oystercatchers, and Rhinoceros Auklets, more particularly the Auklets, which were far the most numerous nesting birds of the island. During the day nothing is to be seen or heard of these birds, but at night their curious calls and whirring flight are everywhere heard. The birds burrow into the perpendicular banks which face the ocean in many places, or into the turf-covered banks, which are only a little less steep. The burrows may lead almost straight into the bank for a dozen to fifteen feet, or more nearly parallel the surface, apparently depending somewhat upon the character of the soil. The few attempts to burrow into coarse gravelly material were soon abandoned in favor of the sandy soil. A very few nest burrows were made within a foot of the surface of the turf and could be uncovered from above. Every burrow examined was forked, the shorter and unused branch invariably being the one nearer the face of the bank, while the used branch continued some distance into the bank, ending in a nest of grassy material mixed with feathers where the hole was enlarged for more room.

Our visit was clearly at about the middle of the breeding time of these birds, for there were half-grown young and eggs less than half incubated, and all grades between. The parent birds were usually found with the young, and often with the eggs. They had the very uncomfortable habit of vigorously using the strong bill upon the intruding fingers, sometimes drawing blood. The young birds seldom offered any resistance, but crouched in the end of the burrow. They are covered with a soft, black down, with a light patch beneath. The eggs were usually filthy from the muddy feet of the old birds, but with the filth washed away revealed a nearly white ground color with much obscured shell markings of lavenders and purples, much like the eggs of the Tufted Puffins.

It is difficult to estimate the numbers of the Rhinoceros Auklets which nest upon this island, because their distribution is not uniform. An estimate based upon the apparent average

number of burrows to the square rod gives 5,000 burrows or 10,000 birds for the entire island. At the time of our visit this number should be increased by about 2,000 downy young. Only one egg is laid in a burrow, and apparently only a single brood is reared in a season.

We did not discover any natural enemies of this Auklet on Destruction Island. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how there could be any enemy dangerous to the egg or young in

Fig. 1.



Destruction Island Light.

the burrow. Snakes and predaceous animals which could enter the burrow would find nothing to eat at other times than the nesting season of the birds. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that this burrowing sea bird may live for ages on this isolated bit of land and multiply its generations.

Next in interest were the Black Oystercatchers, which were more numerous upon this island than any other place which we visited—twelve pairs in all. They were the first inhabitants to protest our landing, and the last to hurl vile epithets after

us upon our departure. There were no nests upon the top of the island, but one was placed at the angle where the bluff met the storm-washed rocks. Most of the nests discovered were built in slight to considerable depressions in the rock, the material used being either rock chips or dry grass, usually the former. One nest was found on the only bit of beach which the island boasted. While some nests were in the midst of vegetation, as shown in the picture, the prevailing position was on the bare rocks. The protective coloration of the eggs which lay upon the rock chips made careful scrutiny of the probable vicinity of the nest necessary; and even then some nests were at first overlooked: The appearance and calls of these elves of the sea must be seen and heard to be appreciated. No words that I can find give more than the merest caricature.

One instance will give an idea of the cunning of the Oystercatchers. We had quietly approached the brow of the cliff, next the slender beach, wholly under cover and early in the morning, in the hope of catching the old bird sitting. Cautiously peeping through the vegetation without exposing ourselves to view, two birds were seen on the rubble below. One of them was nestling down in a very suggestive manner, the other apparently standing carelessly. As we pushed aside the bushes and prepared to descend the sitting bird cautiously sneaked away, apparently feeding as she did so, while the other retained the careless attitude. As we approached the foot of the cliff both birds took wing, protesting loudly, the one standing not having moved from his tracks before. One of us had carefully marked the spot which the sitting bird left so cautiously, confidently expecting to find the nest; the other went to the place of the standing bird—and the nest was here! The picture shows the two eggs in their setting of pebbles and drift. Was it conscious deception by both birds, or only an ordinary reaction?

Two nests of the Pigeon Guillemot were found in their characteristic position in little wind-holes worn out of the sandstone. One of these was in a part of the reef shown in the illustration. There were probably about fifteen pairs about the island. These birds had the habit of resting almost flat-

bodied upon the rocks, or standing erect upon a sharp pinnacle at attention when any disturbance threatened. When forced to fly they merely launched out into the air and quivered or sailed down to the sea, plumping clumsily into the water with a great splash.

Two nests of the Glaucus-winged Gull were found, one having evidently been destroyed by crows or ravens which regularly came out from the mainland. Numerous Gulls found

Fig. 2.



Destruction Island reefs: the mainland in the distance.

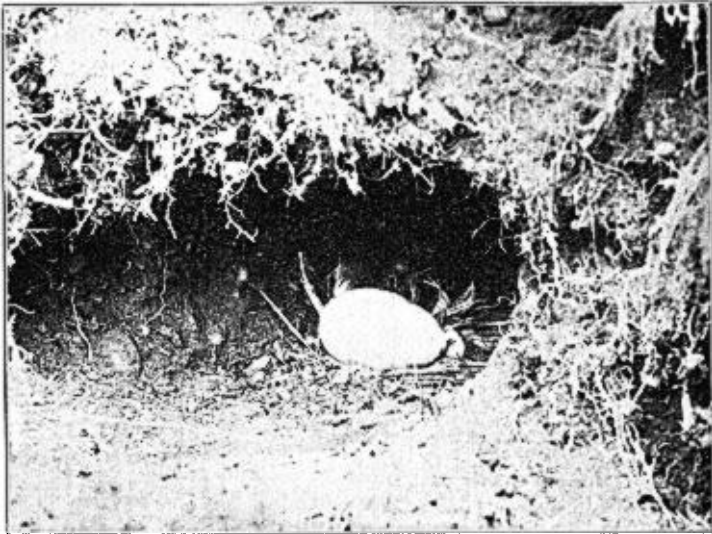
perches upon the outlying rocks, but apparently few of them were breeding birds. An occasional Western Gull was seen among the rest.

The other resident birds of Destruction Island, which we found, were as follows: Rufous Hummer (*Setasphorus rufus*), Rusty Song Sparrow (*Melospiza cinerea morphna*), Sooty Fox Sparrow (*Passerella iliaca fuliginosa*), Barn Swallow (*Hirundo erythrogastra*), Lutescent Warbler (*Helmin-*

thophila celata lutescens), Yellow Warbler (*Dendroica aestiva*), Western Winter Wren (*Olbiorchilus hiemalis pacificus*), Russet-backed Thrush (*Hylocichla ustulata*), Western Robin (*Merula migratoria propinqua*). There were also a number of transient species, but they scarcely need mention in this connection.

The two women went on by canoe to Granville, so that the return northward was effected in a much lightened canoe, and

Fig. 3.



Rhinoceros Auklet (*Cerorhinca monocerata*).
Egg and nest at the end of a short, shallow burrow.
Destruction Island.

consequently more comfortable and more quickly. It was only poetic justice that the horrors of the sea gat hold upon us after three days of gourmandizing, but respite and relief were found in a short stop on Alexander Island, well toward our rendezvous at LaPush. Here we found Glaucus-winged Gulls, Tufted Puffins, Cassin Auklets, and Kæding Petrels in undisputed possession. Studies of these birds will be given in a later paper.