

Sweet Minstrel of the Night

By IRENE FINLEY

"WHAT is that night bird that seems to move from place to place in the dark bushes, and that has such a medley of strange sounds?" "I heard a bird chattering last night. He seemed to be trying to imitate other birds, or he thought he was leading a Christmas carol. What was he?" "A real roller of a bird has come into our district. He mews to the cat, whistles to the dog, and glugs like a bullfrog, and he never lets up until near morning. Is there any way to make him tired of listening to himself?"

Such questions by Journal readers interested in bird life are not infrequent, particularly at this time of year.

My answer is: "You have been listening to a bird that has no equal as a night singer, the largest and most unwarbler-like of all American warblers, a bird with a real sense of humor and unbounded enjoyment in his own vocal tricks, a Tom Sawyer comedian. He is the long-tailed chat. His Eastern relative is the yellow-breasted chat."

We have many song birds that one may hear from daylight till the sun sets, but it is unusual and a treat to hear a bird that sings for the very love of it, most of the day and on to midnight or later. In Southern California the nights are filled with the song of the mockingbird who calls from the avocado and fig orchards, or even roams the pepper trees along the city streets. He has a bolder temperament than the chat, and mimics his neighbors also, but he is of an entirely different bird family and never comes North. The catbird is a double for the chat, but not quite such a buffoon. One other bird that cannot resist expressing his appreciation of the soft spring night is the white-crowned sparrow of the dooryard. From a clump of bamboo at the back door he holds in as long as he can, then explodes with a clear piercing call that shatters the stillness.

In the northern region, especially on moonlight nights, one may hear the chuckling tones and twisted phrases of the long-tailed chat.

Chat Shifts His Voice— But Not His Location

I was looking out of the window down through the tall firs and on to the river where a late, red-gold moon had fallen into the water whose current was trying to dissolve the brilliant ball and carry it away.

That Bird That Sings You To Sleep (or Keeps You Awake) Is, Likely as Not the Chat

One minute it was round. The next its even curve was broken into ragged edges and glittering shafts of light that rippled away down stream. But it wasn't the moon nor the river that held me at the window at midnight. It was the voice of a bird that came up clear and ringing through the firs. The chat had come to our woods.

It was the spirit of the night, a resonant rollicking voice without a form, alone but not lonesome. "Cher! Cher! Cher!" clear and strong it came from the dark tangle along the river bank. A minute later three notes in a higher pitch startled me from an entirely different position, with no movement or sound of wings to tell of their going. How did he do it? How did he find his way through the dark trees and brush? He didn't. Again and again he appeared to change position, his voice trailing off like a far-away farewell.

Voice in the Night Speaks Also at Dawn

Really, the smug little actor sat on his limb and touched another button to put a muffler on his clarion voice, and so fooled one into thinking he had taken a flight up the valley. In rapid succession and changing pitch, now low and rich, now high and full, that voice was ventriloquial like an echo. Did he sing to a nearby mate on her nest to keep her reassured and contented? Or did he sing to the moon and the woods because he couldn't help it?

The moon waned; the tall firs grew dim. There was no gold ball for the river to wash away. And suddenly there was no bird singing. At 3 o'clock the moon went down. The trees were dead black, the river a dim ribbon of the earlier night. But life was awakening. There were sleepy cheepings from all the bird residents. They increased to a soft chorus, answers back and forth, small excitements at getting out of bed. Then from the deep limbs of a fir a small form landed out, and another and another here and there, sparrows, violet-green swallows, a vireo, a towhee and others of the community colony who had refused

earlier to be inveigled from their beds by the romantic chat. Perhaps they had listened annoyed at his moon-struck mewings.

So far we had known our chat only as a voice in the night. In the morning we descended the hill that led to the brushy region along the river. Before we came near enough to scare him, I thought to distract him by whistling some of his own calls (as best I could). We sat down in a half brushy place and waited. Soon "Kook! Kook! Kook!" was the advance he made. I mimicked it. Curiosity led him nearer. "Kwook!" he said harshly with a twist in the note. "Do that one if you can." I tried it, and then again, as he seemed astonished. He came nearer and squinted and peered through the limbs. Then he slid out of sight but not far away and fairly started a barrage of all the things he knew, three soft low notes, three high pitched ones, a string of guttural scoldings, a rapid rippling series, and then he whistled to a dog so well that the canine would have been forgiven for being taken in. He was determined to out-do any challenge.

We saw a bird of sparrow size, upper parts grayish glossed with olive-green, a white eye ring; chin, throat and breast rich yellow with a clear line where it joined the pure white of the under parts; bill and feet blackish. We did not witness the chat's love song. Dawson calls it the "dropping song" and says, "it is one of the choicest of avian comedies, for it is acted as well as sung. The performer flings himself into mid-air, flutters upward for an instant with head upraised and legs dejectedly dangling, then slowly sinks on hovering wings, with tail swinging up and down like a mad pump handle—Punch as Cupid, smitten with the mortal sickness. All this while the zany pours out a flood of tumultuous and heart-rending song. He manages to recover as he nears the brush, and his fiancée evidently approves this sort of buffoonery."

The same writer says "the full song of the chat is usually delivered from some elevation, a solitary tree rising above dense cover. The music almost defies analysis, for it is full



LONG-TAILED CHAT

of surprises, vocal somersaults and whimsy turns. Its cadence is rag-time and its richest phrases are punctuated by flippancy jests and droll parentheses. Even in the tree-top the singer clings closely to the protect-

ing greenery, whence he pitches headlong into the thicket at the slightest intimation of approach."

We had just about covered the 24 hours of the chat's day and night. From 3 in the morning for about

three hours he was silent. Then he began again and filled out the forenoon with his practicing. In the middle of the day he subsided to his thicket for a siesta. Late afternoon found him at it again, and on into the night. How could he listen to his jumble of whistles, chucks and caws through all the hours of the nesting season? Perhaps it gets on his mate's nerves as she builds a flimsy nest and raises but one brood a year. He is undoubtedly an eccentric, but that there is method in his madness no one who studies him closely can doubt.

How Cities Win Safety Prizes

By WILLIAM ULLMAN

THERE is no state or community lacking a desire to make its streets and highways really safe, but all too often the exact know-how is wanting. Accordingly, there is enlightenment for all concerned in examination of just how winners of the grand prizes in the latest National Traffic Safety contest of the National Safety Council achieved that distinction.

Among all the states, Rhode Island was officially judged to have accomplished most toward the protection of life and limb during 1939, while Kansas City, Mo., carried off top honors in the city classification.

In Rhode Island a truly amazing record was found. Its rate of only four traffic deaths per 100,000,000

vehicle miles was by far the lowest for any state and was less than one third the national average. This was hailed as an outstanding example of the success which can be attained through a well-balanced safety program carried on by all appropriate state departments and supported by citizens' organizations of many kinds.

Kansas City won its grand award by reducing traffic fatalities 53 per cent., the result of a comprehensive safety program carried on by the city traffic engineer, the police, the schools and the Kansas City Safety Council.

Here are the dominant factors in the safety programs which brought top honors in the year's general crusade against traffic casualties:

Rhode Island believes in thorough law enforcement as an essential contribution to safety. This is proved by the fact that of 134 persons arrested as the result of accident investigations by the state police, 133 were convicted. Of 1232 arrested for all types of traffic law violations only two escaped conviction. In addition, 2188 drivers lost their operating permits through suspension, and 280 by revocation. A total of 15,308 new drivers were examined before licenses were issued and 7578 were subjected to tests as the result of complaints, violations or accidents.

Would Teach Safety In Public Schools

This prize-winning state recommends that safety be taught in all schools and itself publishes a course of study and a safety manual. A short course in safety, carrying credits, is available in the state teachers college.

Traffic safety publicity originating with the state government included 140 newspaper articles given state-wide circulation, thousands of copies of the state motor vehicle laws and other traffic safety pamphlets and 400 billboard-size posters. Safety messages went on the air in 45 radio programs, not including regular spot safety features broadcast regularly by three stations.

Co-operating actively with the governmental agencies responsible for the state's program is the governor's advisory council on highway safety.

A reduction of 53 per cent. in its traffic fatalities was chiefly responsible for Kansas City winning the national grand award for municipalities. Only 32 motor vehicle deaths were charged against the Missouri city, compared with 69 during the preceding year. The contest judges pointed out that this achievement was all the more remarkable because of political upheavals which occurred in the city during the year.

A clue to Kansas City's success is found in the fact that the municipal safety council is one of the most active of such groups in the country. It helps maintain citizen interest and support for safety engineering, education and enforcement programs.

The city has a full-time traffic

engineer who is responsible to the director of public works. He has staff help equaling the services of four men and nearly 3000 man-days were spent last year making engineering studies of high accident locations, checking speed and traffic volume and inspecting street improvements to make sure safety features were incorporated.

During the past year Kansas City improved 7½ miles of streets and maintained 82 miles of pavement markings. All its traffic signs and signals conform to the standards of the National Conference on Street and Highway Safety.

The police department assigns 143 officers to full-time traffic or accident prevention work, while 299 others have similar part-time duty. During 1939 the police investigated 3104 accidents and made 2974 arrests, obtaining 2271 convictions. There were 52,784 persons arrested or given summonses for traffic violations other than parking infractions. Convictions were obtained in 46,993 cases and 254 defendants got off with suspended sentences. One court hears traffic cases exclusively.

In Kansas City both public and parochial schools keep records of traffic accidents involving children, regardless of where they occur. These are summarized monthly, the results being distributed to teachers and printed in the school papers as well as being used as the basis of school safety work. One hundred and sixteen schools have Junior Safety Councils and an equal number with school safety patrols. The school program also includes a variety of contests, safety plays and assemblies.

Particular attention was directed at safe bicycle riding and the prevention of hitch-hiking. A safety parade was held recently in which more than 5000 children took part.

The five radio stations in Kansas City broadcast 280 hours of safety programs, and 2442 newspaper articles, exclusive of routine accident reports, were published during the year. More than 1400 safety posters were maintained and the traffic engineer's office prepared an illustrated Traffic Digest, 40,000 copies of which were distributed by the Boy Scouts.

(An Ullman Feature—Copyrighted)

Fish Bite Better After Rainfall

The adage that fish bite better after a rainfall appears to have been borne out by the Cornell university department of fisheries' experiment.

Following a day of heavy rain three of the four selected fishermen who were granted permission for angling privileges on the university's 2000 feet of experimental area in Cascadilla creek were reported to have taken 16 trout up to noon. The fourth fisherman had not arrived then.

This total was considered exceptionally good, considering that the first four fishermen who whipped the stream the previous day took only 12 during the entire day.

Otter Was a Bit Too Much for Collie

By WILLIAM L. FINLEY AND ED F. AVERILL



Mrs. J. C. Meehan, and Prince, the dog that met a tartar in an otter.

PRINCE, a large collie owned by Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Meehan, and who spends most of the time with them at Y. M. C. A. Camp Meehan, on the shores of Spirit lake, is the lucky survivor of a fierce battle with *Lutra hudsonica pacifica*, otherwise an otter.

One of the largest colonies of otter now remaining in the Pacific Northwest is found in and about the waters of Spirit lake.

For two months the dog and the

trous fur is among the fiercest of fighters when cornered, he is by nature one of the most peaceloving creatures to be found on land or in the water. Besides, the collie, weighing 104 pounds, was so much larger and looked so savage when rushing at them that they lost no time in diving deep and far. A full grown otter weighs only 20 pounds.

But one early morning Prince saw an opportunity. An otter had caught for himself a large trout and was carrying it to shore to be eaten. In his pleasure at the prospect of a fine breakfast, he forgot his customary caution. No sooner had he started to climb from the lake than the dog, watching on the bank, leaped and grabbed him. This time there was no escape for the otter, and the battle was on.

The greater weight and strength of the dog enabled him to drag his opponent to shore. But if the collie thought all he had to do was to kill his fancied enemy, he was mistaken. While otters are gentle, playful animals with little of the savage disposition of the weasels, are easily tamed and make intelligent pets, when cornered they fight with such ferocity and to such good purpose they are more than a match for most any dog.

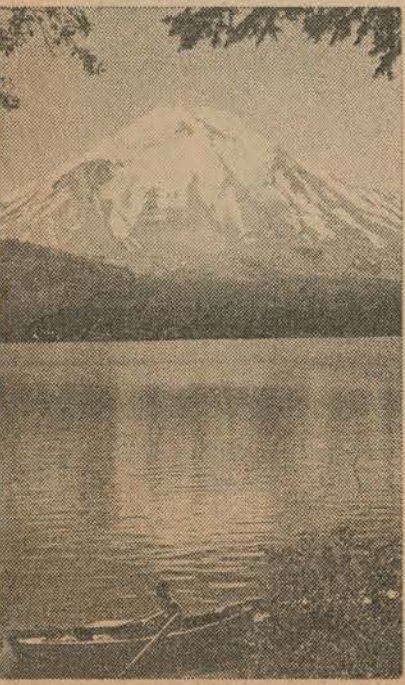
The otter soon realized this was to be no playful encounter such as he had often had with his fellows in the lake. This was to be a battle to the death. A tooth and claw struggle. Sometimes the otter would be on top, but not for long. Being out-weighted, he was forced for the most part to fight defensively from underneath. This was not altogether unsatisfactory to him, for his strong webbed feet were also equipped with sharp claws, and while struggling to get a death grip on the throat of the collie he was savagely raking the belly of the dog with front and hind feet.

Both animals finally weakened because of the intensity of the struggle and through loss of blood. But the otter seemed in better fighting

trim and finally his superior fighting tactics began to tell. He got the coveted hold on the dog's throat and slowly dragged him to the lake. Once in the water he knew he could pull his foe underneath the surface and drown him.

In this he would have succeeded but for the arrival of Tom Docherty, caretaker at the camp. Wading out in the water up to his middle, Docherty seized the tail of the collie and pulled him to shore. The otter, his jaws locked in a death grip on the dog, was brought in also. He was dead. He had dragged the dog into the lake in one last supreme effort.

Mount St. Helens and Spirit lake. On the far shore the battle waged.



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Collie Also, Just Then, More Dead Than Alive

And Prince also seemed to be more dead than alive. For a half-hour or more he lay on the grass completely exhausted. He still has scars and a limp as a result of the battle. Since collies are intelligent dogs, we suspect that hereafter he will vent his anger at the otters merely by barking.