

BIRDS AND ANIMALS ARE CURIOUS

Most animals, like man, have a prominently developed bump of inquisitiveness. They must needs investigate and inquire into every new and curious thing they encounter. As a result they sometimes meet with disaster and not infrequently interfere seriously with man's affairs.

An adventuresome squirrel climbed a pole supporting a wire carrying an electric current of 36,500 volts at St. Cloud, Minn. He grounded this powerful current and paid for his curiosity with his life. His body was later found at the foot of the pole, his whiskers and ears burned off and a big hole rent in his body. Incidentally, the service of a number of substations over some 26 miles of line was interrupted.

In another case a 2200-volt feeder of a railroad signal system was burned out. Men sent to locate the trouble found that the wire was grounded and broken. Following it up to the point of breakage they discovered the charred bodies of two mice. Evidently the inquisitive animals had gnawed through the insulation and short-circuited the current with unfortunate results to themselves as well as to the signal system.

A semaphore board at a railroad crossing in Tarrytown, New York, was observed to swing up and down in an unwonted manner, giving the signals "danger" and "clear" alternately. The gateman, glancing at the other semaphores, found them all doing a similar crazy dance and decided that something very unusual must have happened. Looking into the conduit carrying the wires over which flowed the electric current for operating he discovered a ground-hog.

A fire was built to smoke Mr. Ground-hog out, although it was not his regular outing day. Another watchman, seeing the smoke, concluded that the crossing was on fire and stopped all trains on his side of the station, including fast expresses. The ground-hog finally gave up and crawled out, and the trains proceeded, their crews all angry at having been delayed.

Sometimes birds and animals through accident rather than curiosity get mixed up with man-made contrivances and cause serious trouble and inconvenience. Often they lose their lives to boot.

Just after a heavy downpour of rain some months ago the current for the motors that run the presses and other machinery at the printing plant were suddenly shut off. The power company was notified and a "trouble" man was sent over the line to discover the cause of the interruption. A few squares away from the building he found a bird's nest built against the wires. This had caused no trouble while dry but after becoming soaked with water it became a sufficiently good conductor to short-circuit the current. When

the nest was removed the normal flow of current was resumed and the machinery started running as usual.

A crane alighted on a tower supporting a high-tension electric wire in California but its rest was of short duration; the 104,000-volt current shot through its body to the ground, putting both the bird and the electric line out of commission, the former for all time.

Night-flying birds are sometimes attracted by the light of lighthouses, much the same as moths are drawn to light from any source. Many are killed as a result of crashing with terrific force against the glass of the windows. One winter, during prolonged zero weather, it was noted that the lights of certain signs in New York city were unusually dim. On investigation great numbers of birds, including sparrows, pigeons and larger species, were found clustering about the bulbs absorbing what warmth radiated from them. This heat, though comparatively slight, apparently saved the lives of thousands of the feathered wanderers.

NEAR-PERPETUAL MOTION

James Cox, a London jeweler, is credited with having produced the nearest approach to a real perpetual-motion device that the world has ever seen, unless we count the gas-meter, as someone has suggested. This device was a clock, built in 1774. It proved a real puzzle, even to the learned scientific men of that day. When the secret finally came out it was found that a barometer supplied the motive power. The mechanism was cleverly devised to be run by fluctuations of the atmospheric pressure, operating through the barometer.

At length the clock was sent to the Chinese emperor as a gift. It was stolen from him and no-one knows what finally became of it. Perhaps it is still running in some out-of-the-way corner of the world, as an eminent man of science who studied it in England declared than it would keep on going until its parts, worn by friction, would no longer function.

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