

Saving Birds from Plume Hunters

U.S. STARTS RESERVATION IN MID-PACIFIC

Millions of Birds of Every Kind Flocking to This Protected Paradise—Returning Scientists tell of Experiences With Feathered Flocks—Story of Poachers' Cruelties Before Uncle Sam Took Charge—Bird Dances.



The Only Human Habitation On Laysan Island.



Walter K. Fisher.

Third Figure Of The Albatross Quadrille.



Uncle Sam's New Home For Birds In Mid-Pacific Ocean.

ONE of the most unique and interesting places in the world is Uncle Sam's home for birds in the middle of the Pacific Ocean recently established by the Government. On two islands, thousands of miles from the beaten track of commerce, tucked away in a little corner of the world all by itself, is a veritable bird paradise. It is truly a wonderful sight to see the millions upon millions of sea birds of every imaginable species that flock to the two places—Laysan and Bird Island, of the Hawaiian group. And what is probably more wonderful, a visitor to the islands can see one of the most remarkable spectacles ever beheld by human eyes—wild birds dancing. Anyone might visit all the menageries and zoos the world over and never see such a thing as large sea birds executing a quadrille and repeating the same antics over and over again. From what scientists say, it looks as if the birds were going through an actual drill like soldiers. After they have gone through the entire evolution they will immediately start at the beginning and do the same thing again, apparently enjoying the game immensely.

During the dance the birds execute many bowing motions as if they were saluting each other, and the scientists who have just returned to Washington say that when a human being goes among them they are interested in their dances and bows, the birds gravely return the bow and continue their amusement. When it is remembered that these are wild birds, it is nothing short of marvelous to see their utter fearlessness of man. Ordinarily all wild creatures are afraid of man, but this is the exception. The members of the recent expedition went among them day after day, and had difficulty to avoid stepping upon them. And this notwithstanding the fact that only a short while before Uncle Sam took charge Japanese poachers had destroyed almost every vestige of bird life on the islands.

History of the Preserve.
On account of the great destruction of birds all over the world, and especially of late years in the United States, the Federal Government realized that something had to be done to prevent complete annihilation of bird life. Only a few years ago the ravages of plume hunters became so great as to cause a universal outcry against the ruthless slaughter. It continued for some time until finally Uncle Sam entered the lists and established reservations or homes for birds in various sections of the United States, from which the bird hunter was excluded under penalty of heavy fine and imprisonment. After seeing that the citizens at home were protected, it occurred to the authorities that something ought to be done for the feathered tribes at sea.

About this time many sailors reported seeing vast flocks of sea birds in the vicinity of the Hawaiian Islands, particularly on Laysan and Bird Island. The Government promptly sent its scientists to investigate, and shortly thereafter a proclamation was issued by President Roosevelt establishing the home for birds in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. Up to this time there was no bird reservation set aside in the United States proper, but this is the first time in the history of the world that a government has undertaken to protect bird life at sea.

Mr. Fisher's Narrative.
Walter K. Fisher was the first scientist sent out by the bureau of fisheries, and his narrative of bird life on Laysan Island is one of the most interesting documents ever published by the Government. A little later Professor Homer R. Day, of the State University of Iowa, made a trip to the islands and only recently returned. This expedition was conducted under the direction of Dr. Henry W. Henshaw, of the biological survey, at Washington, and its unusually interesting results are published for the first time in the

Agricultural Year Book just issued. "I have seen many peculiar and unusual sights in my lifetime," said Mr. Fisher, when requested to tell of his experience on the islands, "but I have never witnessed anything more curious and amusing as the performance I saw on the island of Laysan."

"From my study of albatrosses they seem to have an innate objection to idleness and seldom stand around doing nothing, but spend much time in curious performance. It has been called courting by some people, but as the antics are carried on during the birds' residence of about 10 months on the island, it is probably an amusement in which the albatross indulges immediately. This game, or whatever one may wish to call it, may have originated during the mating period, but it certainly has long since lost any such significance."

The Ridiculous Dance.
"The dance is performed something like this: Two albatrosses approach each other, bowing profoundly and all the time. Next they fence a little, crossing bill and winging them together, pecking, meanwhile, and dropping stiff little bows. Suddenly one lifts its closed wing and nibbles at the feathers underneath, or, rarely, if in a hurry, merely turns its head and tucks its bill under its wing. The other bird during this short performance assumes a statuesque pose and either looks from side to side or snaps its bill loudly a few times. Then the first bird bows once, and pointing its head and beak straight upward, rises on its toes, puffs out its breast, and utters a prolonged nasal groan. The other bird snapping its bill loudly and rapidly at the same time. Sometimes both birds raise their heads in the air and either one or both utter the indescribable and ridiculous bovine groan. When they have finished they begin bowing again, rapidly and alternately, and presently repeat the performance. The birds reversing their roles in the game. There is no hard and fast order to these antics, which seem rather to be a sort of 'make work,' but many variations occur. Sometimes three engage in the play, one dividing its attention between two. They are always most polite, never repeat the performance, or offering any violence. The whole affair partakes of the nature of a snappy drill, and is more or less mechanical."

"Occasionally one will lightly pick up a twig or grass straw and present it to the other. This one does not accept the gift, however, but quickly returns the compliment. Then straws are promptly dropped and all begin bowing and walking about as if their very lives depended upon it. I have seen as many as 20 couples hard at work bowing and groaning on all sides, and paying not the slightest attention to my presence. When walking through grassy portions of the island I have noticed white heads bobbing up and down above the green, as solitary pairs were amusing themselves away from the larger congregations of their kind. If I walked up to them they would stop and gaze at me in a deprecating way, and walk off, still bowing, with one eye in my

direction. Having reached what they considered a respectful distance, they would fall to and resume their play."

Courtesy Toward Human Belings.
"Should a person enter a group of albatrosses engaged in this diversion and begin to bow very low, the birds will walk around in a puzzled sort of way, bowing in return, a curious fact, which F. H. Van Kittitz recorded as early as 1834. When Herr Isenbeck met one, he used to bow to it, and they were polite enough to answer, bowing and cackling in return."

"One moonlight night we strolled over the island after nocturnal petrels and visited a portion of a populous albatross colony. The old birds were still hard at work executing that queer 'song dance,' and in the uncertain light the effect was one long to be remembered. Their white plumage made them conspicuous for a great distance over the stretches near the lagoon. From all sides the sound of their groans and whistles was audible above the continual thin, high squeak of young albatrosses and the moans and caterwauling of shearwaters and petrels. During a quieter spell in the activities of the vocalists above the groans were borne to us across the placid lagoons, as a reminder that in other parts the good work was still going on. By this time many of the birds had started off fishing, as they seem to do a large part of it after dark, probably toward morning."

"Two very striking facts at once im-

pressed the visitor to these islands—the great number of birds and their surprising tameness. The effect of this is at first nearly overpowering. Birds are everywhere, and the noise is deafening. When we made our way through a populous colony of sooty terns we had to exercise much care to avoid crushing their eggs and treading on the birds. They would struggle and panic stricken before us with the old ruse of a broken wing, and then suddenly taking flight, swarmed over our heads. If we wanted to talk, we had to shout in order to be heard."

"In the defense of the island, and would soon appear as if they had known us always. The little rills scampered hither and thither like diminutive barnyard fowls, but soon returned craning their necks to discover why they had retreated. When we sat working, not infrequently the little miller bird came and perched for a moment on our table and chair backs, and the Laysan finch and rail walked about our feet in busy search for flies and bits of meat. The beautiful little red honey-eater visited us each day at meal time, and sought for millers in the crannies and seams between the boards. Thus, wherever we

went we were free to watch and learn, and were trusted by the birds. It seems a most touching and unique experience, and one which demonstrates all too forcibly the attitude of wild creatures which have not yet learned that man is usually an enemy."

Island Residents Take Turns.

"In spite of the excellent view of all the space at their disposal, the birds on this island would not be able to find room if all arrived at the same time. So they take turns. Some species leave the place as soon as their young are strong enough to fly, and while the former occupant is leaving the newcomers already begin to arrive. Thus there is a constant coming and going, and it follows that breeding species are found at almost every season of the year, a fact which is remarkable even in the tropics, where the breeding season is generally less regular than in our latitudes. In this way a definite succession, which probably dates back thousands of years, takes place, year after year in the arrival and departure of certain species of birds."

"The sooty terns—a beautiful bird—are to be seen in great numbers on these islands. The birds don't like to leave their nest, and scold soundly before finally slipping off. When at last driven, they limp away, dragging their wings in a painful manner, just as our own birds do. Thus, here, on a little island, is this firmly implanted instinct strongly in evidence, and practiced where it can be of no possible ad-

vantage to the bird. Sometimes a dozen or more will struggle on ahead of a pedestrian, trampling over each other and crying incessantly, kicking and pecking at the feet of the intruder, endeavor to escape, while overhead their fellows keep up an incessant screaming. There is always a great cloud of these birds flying back and forth over the colony, even when no disturbing element is present. They seem to need the nervous excitement. Just at sunrise they are most noisy, for then they are returning from the sea, where I have heard them at various times during the night."

The Old Love Birds.

"The white tern, or love bird, as it is sometimes called, is one of the least abundant of the sea birds on this island. The air of independence they assume is very amusing. A peculiar trait of the white tern is its habit of occasionally depositing an egg on the bare limb of a bush. Here the bird stands over it, with its head bowed, as if it were a miser, and the young is undoubtedly hatched, though we saw none. We watched the bird sitting on the egg and when she flew off it was not a hatched bird. It is safe to assume that a heavy wind would play havoc if this habit were general. We frequently saw these terns resting near their homes, the two standing side by side, but they do not seem to brood so much as other species. They do not sit on their egg in the ordinary manner, but stand over it, as their legs are short."

Returning to the subject of the albatross, Mr. Fisher said: "There seems scarcely a tuft of grass that has not an unguessed young bird in its shadow ready to snap at the intruder with a show of ferocity. These amusing creatures sit on their heels with the whole length of the body on the ground, or tilted slightly in the air. Their spare time is spent in gazing stupidly around, but if their reverie is at all disturbed by one passing too near they fly into an apparent rage, lean forward and snap their beaks viciously, or away their uncouth bodies from side to side in a frantic attempt to make a baton of the intruder. But they seldom come to blows. Sometimes they make a rush, waddling along and darting their heads back and forth to the music of clicking mandibles. But they seldom come to blows. Sometimes they make a rush, waddling along and darting their heads back and forth to the music of clicking mandibles. But they seldom come to blows."

This interesting story is told by Mr. Fisher of the arrival of a new species of birds on the island while the scientists were there. "I remember most vividly the evening of August 17, when the first petrels arrived. They came by hundreds. The next morning there were more, and on the third day thousands filled the air. The new guests were pretty birds, barely of the size of a domestic pigeon, but they began to dominate all the island in such a way that the few pairs of tropic birds, terns and others still breeding, made way before them as if they could not stand these noisy neighbors. They are, on land, nocturnal, and at once took possession of their thousands of subterranean burrows. In the bright moonlight one could see them busily engaged in removing the loose sand from holes, most of which had more or less col-

lapsed since they had left them. Loving couples selected their nests and fought hard for them against intruders. Quarrels, fights and clamor became incessant. In a few days there was no spot with sandy soil where the ear-splitting 'song' of these petrels could not be heard. Under every bush, behind our luggage cases and, alas, also under our bedroom floor the tune was raised. It is a cross between the sound that 'drives men to madness' and the cries of new-born babies which are only harmonious to their devoted parents. The face of the island was entirely changed."

Serious Side of the Bird Problem.

Turning to the more serious side of the bird problem, Dr. Henry W. Henshaw, Uncle Sam's chief bird man, tells something of the history of bird life and the inhuman cruelty of Japanese poachers on Laysan and Bird Islands before Uncle Sam took charge.

"The spread of civilization and the use of wild lands, added to the destruction of animals for food, adornment, clothing and sport, threaten the very existence of many species of native birds and mammals," said Dr. Henshaw. "The necessity of regulating the killing of game, and the preservation of our colonial history, and even the need of caring for our insectivorous birds found recognition about 1880. Only in recent years, however, has the importance been recognized of protecting the large class of birds which are worthy of preservation because of their beauty, grace and harmlessness. If such birds add nothing to our material wealth, they beautify the world and greatly increase the joy of living. It is a refuge for seabirds that Laysan and Bird Islands are chiefly notable. The reefs and waters about Laysan and the other island fairly teem with fish, crustaceans, squids and other forms of sea life, thus affording food in abundance for sea fowl, as well as solitude and protection for them and their young. For ages these ocean wanderers have found the islands an ideal home, and at certain seasons swarmed there covering every bit of available territory, and all in all forming perhaps the most unique bird rookery in the world. Off Laysan alone several million birds breed every year."

The Poachers' Cruelties.

"Not all the birds that resort to this little island could possibly nest on it at one and the same time, and as the result of ages of experience each species comes in turn and thus secures room. Schaudinn, a noted scientist, who spent three months on the island in 1835, compared the birds' domestic arrangements there to the series of flats in a large town. The petrels and shearwaters and the Laysan finch, terns, shearwater, gannets, man-o-war birds, and albatrosses. In all, more than two dozen species of land and sea birds breed on Laysan during the year. Professor Dill estimated that at the time of his visit upward of 1,000,000 sea birds were nesting on the island."

"When Professor Dill first visited Laysan it appeared as if the poachers had stripped the place of bird life. An area of more than 300 acres on each side of the buildings was apparently abandoned. Only the shearwaters moaning in their burrows, the little wingless rail skulking from one grass tussock to another, and the Laysan finch remained. It was an excellent example of the survival of the inconspicuous."

"On every side were bones bleaching in the sun, showing where the poachers had plucked the birds as they stripped them of wings and feathers. In the old open guano shed were seen the remains of thousands of wings, which were placed there but never cured for shipping, as the marauders were interrupted in their work."

Starving Birds to Death.

"An old cistern back of one of the buildings took the form of a large charge, his bird citizens have been increasing rapidly, and the islands look today very much as they did before the poachers came. And just as soon as the aid of Congress can be enlisted in the cause it is the intention of the Government further to safeguard the interests of the feathered tribes at sea, by the appointment of a warden, with one or two assistants, to see that no harm comes their way in the future." (Copyright, 1912, by William L. Aldort-ter.)

DEFENSIVE BASEBALL BY "HAL" CHASE

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rectly in front of the catcher when he gets the ball in his glove, it is necessary for the catcher to step to one side of the plate before getting the ball started for second.

The Ball in Play.
"After taking the step into a free throwing position the man with a big mitt also needs to steady himself before he can deliver the ball with any assurance of accuracy. The defensive move to overcome this handicap is to have the pitcher send up the ball high and fast several feet wide of the plate on the side of the batter. This is one of the oldest of practiced defensive plays."

"It was used by all the famous old batteries of baseball history and yet many ardent admirers of the sport are not wise to it even now."

"Sometimes the battery will waste as many as three pitches in this strategic effort to nail a base-runner with suspected purloining propensities. Then if the suspect, contrary to the customary procedure of swift base-runners, should decide to stick to first a base on balls may be the vexatious result of the deep-laid plot."

of our star boxmen prove equal to the occasion and no damage is done to our defensive efforts even though the conspiracy has failed."

"It is very unlikely that any left-handed batter will succeed in pulling the ball toward first base if it comes up close over the inside corner. The same deduction may be applied to right-handers' chances of hitting in the direction of third base."

"So you see we have various ways of getting a line on the probable direction of all batted balls."

"Then with a fast runner on first and a left-handed batter up, in all probability

instructed to hit toward right field so that a single would give the man on first a chance to make third on the hit, the pitcher would be signed to keep the ball in close to the batter, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, that's it, and if the pitcher makes good his instructions the best the man at bat is likely to produce is an infield rocket for the first baseman to corral."

"At this juncture of the interview, my subject having unexpectedly ceased to expatiate, I found myself fishing for a new question. The wait presented Hal Chase with his first good opportunity to excuse himself, and he made the most of an evident desire to end our talk and get busy on the ball field."

"Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go out and get a little much-needed batting practice," he said, at the same time making a move in the direction of the diamond.

"Feeling that I had nearly pumped him dry on the vital points of defensive baseball, I had no desire to detain him further."

As we parted, a couple of urchins loitering about the field entrance, came up to me. They looked at Hal's retreating figure and asked:

"Isn't that Hal Chase, mister?"

"If it is," said I.

"Gee," said the bigger of the two, "but I'd like to see him play that first bag again. He's the only Hal."