

Oddities of Some Philippine Jungle Birds

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One That Makes Soup Stock: The Feathered Tailor

Among the birds of the Philippines are the most remarkable variations, the nests of some of them turning up regularly at ostentatious Chinese banquets in the soup. Bird-nest soup is a delicacy with the Chinese, and the Malays risk their lives to gather the nests, which are worth more than their weight in gold. To build the nests, the birds, a variety of swifts, exude a gelatinous substance from the salivary glands; and to protect the nests they attach them to steep cliffs. *Peñon de Coron*, between Culion, the leper island, and Busuanga, is a favorite repository; Guimaras and Siguior are others. To rob the birds of their nests the natives let themselves down the sides of the cliffs with long rattans, which may be found in the forests of the Philippines to the length of 600 feet. When the birds are too persistently robbed, they eke out the secretion with bits of moss and fine grass, from which fact arises the erroneous conjecture that their nests are really built of sea moss.

The mound builders have other plans for evading man's incessant depredations. They build mounds on sandy shores or in the soft earth of forests and deposit their eggs in them at a depth of three or four feet, the base of the mounds sometimes having a diameter of fifteen feet. The eggs are larger than hen eggs and very rich in yolk. Complete incubation occurs in the mounds; the younglings scratch their way to the surface and shift for themselves from the beginning. The natives prize the eggs as food, and resort to a cruel means of get-

ting them. They dig the top of the mound away and cover the base with boards. The parent birds cannot dig through these boards; they finally deposit the eggs on the boards, where their despoilers easily gather them up. Even if left on the boards, they would not hatch. The success of this scheme depends wholly upon the habit of pairs of mound builders of returning to the same nesting spot year after year.

Enormous hornbills are found in the Philippines. One grotesque variety is the *kalaw*, as the Filipinos name it. The male is very cantankerous with his spouse; he does not countenance modern ideas for a moment. He selects for her a hollow tree. Here, when she has laid her eggs, he walls her up, using a thick mortar of mud for the purpose and leaving only a small aperture through which he deigns to feed her while she is bringing their brood into the jungle world. He stands watch close by, and squawks to her the news of the day. His calls are regular, a harsh and awful racket in the silent forests; so that the native saying is that the kalaw calls off the hours of the day and is as good as a town clock.

On the sides of the cliffs of Balete pass, on the road penetrating the Cagayan valley, Igorots have dug a kind of roosting place of their own. These are bird traps of an ingenious sort. They are just big enough for a man to crouch within, over a candle or oil taper kept burning through the night. The lights decoy the birds, which fly swiftly into them and are bruised sufficiently to

be easily captured by the Igorot on watch. Bats are no doubt included in a night's takings. The traps, apparently all aflame, give the cliffs a weird aspect at night.

It is well known, of course, that bats of many varieties are so numerous in the Philippines as to constitute a nuisance only mitigated by the enormous guano deposits in the caves they haunt by day, which material furnishes an excellent phosphoric ingredient for chemical fertilizer. The limestone cliffs of Montalban gorge, the end of a beautiful drive from Manila, are, one might almost say, impregnated with bat caves. The noisome and pilfering inhabitants of these caves fly out of them at sunset in myriads that fairly blacken the sky. Hawks await these twilight forays of midnight foragers, and swoop down and take a luscious supper.

Of birds of prey in the Philippines there are no less than 45 species, 22 of which are peculiar to the islands. They vary in size from a tiny falcon the size of a sparrow to the huge harpy eagle that feeds upon monkeys and catches them in its sure talons as they leap from tree to tree. Specimens are very difficult to take. Many birds of the Philippines are brilliantly colored, but few are good songsters; to share the brooding silence of the jungle seems a part of their *protective coloring*. Jungle life is prolific beyond ordinary description. The devices of the birds to perpetuate their kind among all their cunning enemies including man, are often most resourceful. "Tailor birds, of which there are nine species, stitch the living leaves of a tree branch together to form their nests. They pierce the leaf edges with their beaks and use a spider web for thread, which they pass back and forth through the holes. Their nests thus made are living green sacs still attached to the tree, and almost perfectly concealed.



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