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FIVE BIRDS
OF
LATIN AMERICA



The Macaws, inhabitants of mainland America from Mexico to Paraguay, have brilliant red, green, blue, and yellow plumage

Five Birds of Latin America

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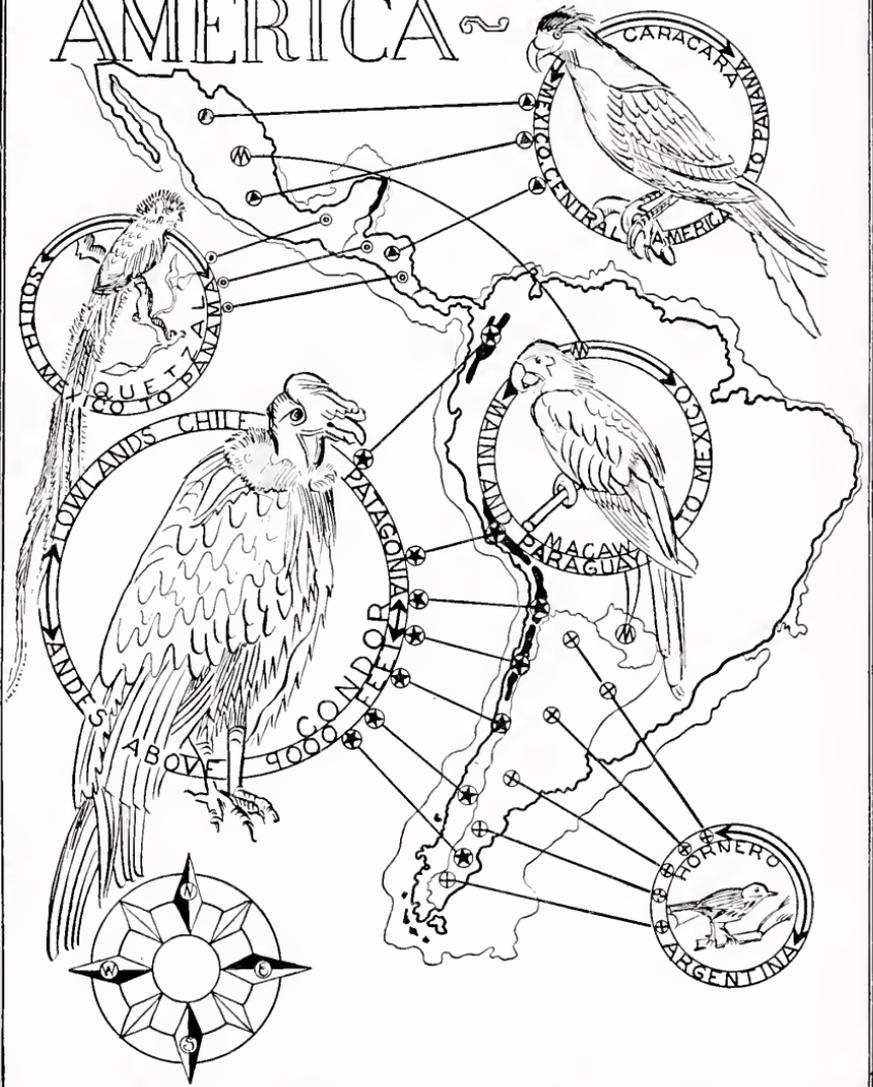
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HABITAT of CONDOR, HORNERO, QUETZAL, MACAW and CARACARA of LATIN AMERICA



BIRDS are Important Neighbors.— Since the dawn of civilization, man has been interested in his bird neighbors. Their ability to fly stirred his imagination. Their disappearance during certain seasons of the year puzzled him. Their migrations kept him guessing. Finally, it dawned upon him that birds keep an exact schedule for departing and returning.

Centuries later someone thought of the simple idea of banding. By this method an important fact was revealed—that the same birds come back year after year. Careful observation has shown that birds take the most direct route to their winter destination. They have special places where they stop to rest and eat.

The banding of birds on a scientific basis was begun in 1902 by Dr. H. Ch.C. Mortensen, a Danish schoolmaster who placed tiny anklets with numbers upon them, on storks, starlings, teals and on several species of birds of prey.

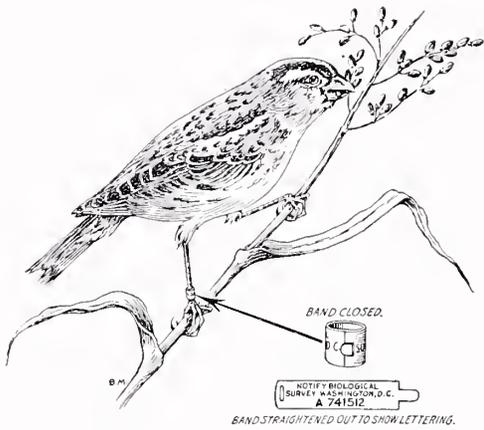
This method of keeping track of birds proved such a success that it was tried by England and many other countries in Europe. In the United States several ornithologists experimented with it. By 1920 birdbanding had become so well established in this country the work was taken over officially by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the United States.

Today, a Migratory Bird Treaty exists between countries protecting migrating birds. No hunting is permitted during certain months.

Pure aluminum bands are used for banding. Letters and numbers for identification are stamped on them. For this purpose no metal has been found as durable or as light as aluminum. In some instances, where special studies of a species have been made, colored bands are used along with the aluminum one.

By banding, studies may be made of the “flying-routes” of birds, of their plumage at certain times of the year, their food habits when away from home, the homing instinct, and other aspects of bird behaviour.

The homing instinct urges the birds to return to the place where they were born. Some birds repeat the annual trip many times. The power of this instinct is such that birds often leave



By the simple method of banding, begun in 1902, it was revealed that the birds come back to the same place year after year

behind them an abundance of food, warm sunshine and countless building sites.

Many miles are covered every year by the tiny hummingbirds. Most of the small birds migrate during the night. This enables them to find food and rest before taking up the journey again.

Birds have two speeds — the average one and the one accelerated by the closeness of home or the fear of attack. The fastest

fliers are said to be the swifts and the peregrine falcon; they exceed 60 miles per hour and have been clocked at over 100.

Some of the commoner summer residents, sandpipers, snipes and plovers of the United States, push across the equator and finally reach their destination, the pampas of Argentina or Patagonia. The marsh wren of the upper Mississippi Valley may travel as far as central Mexico. The well-known barn swallow takes a longer trek to western Paraguay. Yellow warblers and purple martins favor Brazil. The nighthawks fly from Argentina to the Yukon and Alaska, a trip of 7,000 miles, so that their young may be born on their own homesite. The longest flight recorded for an individual bird is that of the Arctic tern, a famous "globe-trotter," who flies in three months from the coast of Labrador to the coast of Southeastern Africa, a distance of 11,000 miles. This same species of tern also flies from the northern Arctic Circle to the southern Arctic Circle of the Western Hemisphere.

The Condor.—The great condor of the Andes is the largest living bird in the world capable of flight. This majestic bird of prey is over four feet long with a wing span of over ten feet. Once this bird is in the air it can soar to amazing heights, rising above snowy peaks until it is not even a pin-point in the sky.

Condors usually take off in groups. There is a whirring sound,

like rushing waters, as they rise in sweeping circles. With the exception of the time when they are ascending from the ground and getting altitude, they rarely flap their wings. As they ride the air currents the skies seem to be their playground.

The condors are glossy black. About the neck is a soft white ruff of down. The head, chest and middle of the neck are bare except for a few sparse hairs, which make the condor look old and bald. However, the head supports a large showy carbuncle of dazzling red and from the throat and chest of the male swings a handsome wattle.

The male's eyes are pale brown; those of his mate, carbuncle red. The formidable horn-brown bill has an ivory colored tip. The great feet are black. The female condor is slightly smaller than the male. She wears neither comb nor wattle.

Condors mate for life. They may live to celebrate their golden wedding anniversary—fifty years. When selecting their home site they range through the highest parts of the Andes, where they may be seen in clear weather soaring over the snowy peaks.

On a ledge or shelf of rock, the skimpy nest is built. There is so little provision made for the comfort of the young, one wonders why they take the trouble to collect the few sticks they do. On this hard mattress will be deposited two white eggs almost four inches long.

Seven weeks later, the young condors struggle from their shells. Their birthday garment is a fine, thick white down which protects them from the direct rays of the sun and the cold winds. The new birds are ugly. Their heads seem too big, their necks too long. Not until many months have passed do they show any interest in flying. But they have been flapping their wings, exercising their spindling legs, and taking numberless sun baths. When they are one to three years old, depending on food and climate, the adult plumage appears.

Condors have an important mission in life. They keep the surface of the earth within their special territory free from decaying animal matter. In other words, they are scavengers. When they locate dead animals, they make a quick meal of them.

Many stories are circulated about the condors swooping down and taking little children, lambs, kids and other small animals, to their nests. These stories are untrue. The birds may kill old, sick or small animals if pressed by hunger, but they consume them on the spot. Unlike eagles, condors do not have strong grasping claws for carrying heavy cargo. They do have sharp bills capable of tearing flesh. Only during the time they are feeding their offspring do the condors take food from the spot where they have been feasting. And this food is predigested before the young get it.

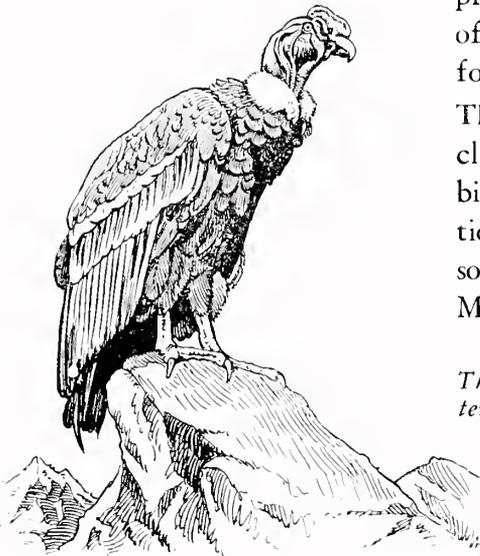
Condors are famous for their gorging habits. They stuff themselves so full they have great difficulty in taking off. The Indians, well aware of this, dig trenches and place food in them. Then they hide close by, often under a well-disguised shelter or camouflaged right in the trench.

The bird, seeing the food, makes a perfect landing beside it. Just as his great black feet come to rest upon the ground, wings still held high, the hunter grasps the condor by the shanks, holding him prisoner, or he may wait until the condor has eaten his fill and is struggling to take off before seizing him. These beneficial birds are caught by the Indians for their feathers, which they use in decorating themselves for their ceremonial dances.

Through the years many condors have been captured and sent to zoological gardens. Though they are prisoners behind bars, these mighty fliers of the vast heights do not seem to grieve for their lost liberty, as some birds do.

The Sacred Quetzal.—Many bird lovers claim the quetzal is the most beautiful bird in the world. This is a great distinction when one considers how many handsomely plumaged birds there are. José Martí, the Cuban patriot and writer, de-

The great glossy black condor has a wing span of ten feet and is largest living bird capable of flight



scribed it in the following words: "It is a bird that gleams in the light, like the head of the hummingbird, which seems made of precious stones or iridescent jewels which in one light are topaz, in another opal, and in still another amethyst."

Once upon a time the quetzal was called Quetzalcoatl after the long lost god of the Mayas and Toltecs. This god taught his people that peace and kindness among themselves were far better than wars and conquest. He also taught that a knowledge of agriculture and offerings of grain, fruits, and perfumes as more acceptable to the gods than human sacrifice. So happiness and prosperity came to his people.

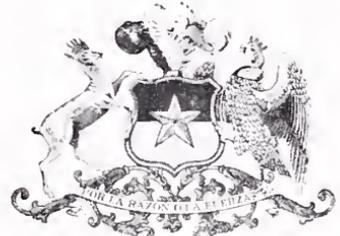
Because of the name it bore, the bird was considered sacred. When Guatemala won its independence, the bird was placed upon the new republic's coat of arms. Because the quetzal cannot live successfully in captivity, it was considered a fitting symbol for the country.

For many years the great beauty of these birds attracted the attention of collectors. Natives skillful in the use of blowguns killed great numbers of them. Now the birds are given legal protection.

The exquisitely colored quetzals have bodies about the size of a turtle dove. Their crested head and back of



BOLIVIA



CHILE



COLOMBIA



ECUADOR

Coat of arms of the American Republics in which a Condor is part of the emblem

bright metallic green contrasts with the brilliant crimson breast and long black wing plumes.

The quetzal cock has a strong yellow bill. His head bears a royal crest of filamentous feathers. The middle wing-coverts are lengthened into graceful flowing plumes. The upper tail-coverts are very long, sometimes four times the length of the tail. The three central ones are black, the outer ones, white. They blend in color with the golden green of the throat and contrast vividly with the crimson breast, abdomen and wing-coverts.

The quetzal's chief identification is his graceful tail of bluish-green feathers sweeping in a two-foot arc. Once these royal plumes were highly prized as ornaments to be worn by the high-ranking Mayan chiefs.

This tail is never suspended perpendicularly but held at an angle of as much as 15 to 20 degrees from a vertical line. Every so often it is flashed open and closed suddenly. This action causes the beautiful pendent tail coverts to vibrate and display their exquisite colors.

The females are more modestly attired. They have a rounded crest. Their eyes are a soft yellowish-brown and their bills almost ebony colored. They do not wear a train.

Quetzals have a habit of sitting almost motionless on a bough high up in some tree. They balance themselves expertly on their tiny feet. Their only movement is the turning of the head from side to side in a slow and dignified manner. But they are noisy and their chattering voices betray their presence.

The quetzal is very fond of ripened fruit. When his keen eyes spot his favorite dish, he is off in a flash, his long tail plumes streaming straight behind like satin ribbons. After obtaining the coveted morsel with a sharp snip of the bill, the return trip is made in a straight line to the landing field which is the same bough and almost the same spot from which he took off.



Quetzal on the coat of arms of Guatemala

The quetzal calls in low softly whistled double notes, "whe-oo, whe-oo," which gradually become louder until they swell into a loud melodious note that is held for some time.

During February, March and April, the quetzals are in full nuptial plumage. They are most colorful and resplendent at this time. The nest contains two greenish-blue eggs.

There are five other species of the genus which are closely related to the famous quetzal. They dwell in the forest regions from Venezuela through Colombia and Ecuador to Peru.

The Macaws of Tropical America.—Macaws belong to the parrot family. They are brilliantly colored residents of tropical America. In their jungle homeland they may be seen flying in pairs or in flocks and nearly always screaming at each other.

Nearly all the macaws are famous for their gaudy colors. Most of the plumage is a bright scarlet, yellow, blue or green. The predominating colors usually determine the name of the bird. Often its colors are in strong contrast, the more so when the bird has a white or yellow face.

The most handsome and colorful macaws are of course the better known. With but one exception the known species inhabit the mainland of America from Mexico to Paraguay. The single exception is the now extinct macaw of Cuba. In the tropics these birds are very abundant.

The blue and yellow macaws are very handsome, talkative birds. They enjoy an extensive range in tropical America from Panama to Bolivia and Guiana. They reach a length of slightly more than thirty inches. Their upper parts are blue. Their forehead is olive green and their ear coverts, side of neck, breast and abdomen are yellow-orange. The tail and wings are blue above and golden olive-green below. This is the macaw so often seen in zoological gardens and private homes. They easily become great pets, but they do not look as well and happy when confined in a cage. Fastened to a high perch with a slender chain about the shank, the macaw observes everything that happens around him with a solemn and comical curiosity. He will scream in delight or anger. To shut him up is no small matter; as a radio broadcaster,

he can generate almost perfect static. The blue and yellow macaw is the member of the tribe whose feathers are in demand by salmon fishermen who use the gay plumage for the making of "flies."

In Mexico and Guatemala the native name for all macaws is "guacamayo," and it is said that the guacamayo of western Mexico does not alight on the ground except during the month of May when the "ara" tree drops its fruit. The macaw is extremely fond of the button-shaped seed. The fruit and the milky sap of this tree is a deadly poison to most animals. But the macaws snip the tough stem with their powerful bills and split open the great pods and break the hard shelled nuts with ease. The nuts of the Royal Palm and the cocoanut are also favorite foods of these birds. They often fly for some distance with a heavy nut in their strong claws or beak.

This macaw is gregarious except during the courting season and when the young must be fed and educated. These birds mate for life. They live to a ripe old age, and are devoted to their mates.

Many macaws establish themselves in the holes of trees. When possible they establish their homes in a wild-fig tree, which is nearly always the largest tree in the forest. Two pure white eggs are laid on bare wood in the snug apartment, the parents taking turns to brood them and later to take care of their twins.

The great green-winged blue and red macaw is the one most common on the Upper Berbice River in British Guiana. It prefers to build in the tops of trees where climbers cannot reach its nest. The Indians shoot it with blowpipes for taming purposes. The blow stuns the macaw, which drops to the ground. The hunter at once gives the bird first aid restoratives. Apparently the captured bird is willing to remain prisoner. It accepts the situation gracefully, becoming quite fond of its captor. It does not seem to grieve for its mate and spends most of its time screaming and throwing nut shells far and wide.

If one enters the domain of these birds in their forest retreat, the steady pitter-patter of the nut shells on the dry leaves below indicates that the macaws are feasting and too busy to gossip.

Very little is actually known about the habits and family life of the macaws in their natural habitat. They are said to possess considerable power of flight and ability to travel long distances for food.

The Hornero, Argentina's National Bird.—To the people of Argentina the friendly little hornero is a good neighbor. Its song is known from the northern province of Jujuy to Patagonia and in every province it is well known and beloved. So the people of Argentina bestowed upon this bird a high honor, naming it their national bird.

Hornero is a Spanish word meaning one of the oven. In the case of this bird its nest is the oven. The little mason selects a building site as close to his human neighbors as he can, frequently using the roof, cornice or rafters of a dwelling.

The hornero is a small but stout bird with a slender curving beak an inch long. The legs are very strong and well suited to walking. He wears a coat of uniform rufous-brown with a slight tinge of red. The undersurface of the plumage is a pale brown. This modest attire never attracts much attention.

Like so many of our interesting birds, this one, too, mates for life. If one of the partners dies, then the bereaved one finds another companion. While he is sociable enough with his many neighbors, he much prefers the company of his mate who understands his moods and listens to all of his songs.

Being a very vain egotist he loves to strut. If he finds a long flat board or smooth sidewalk he is wild with delight. He flies swiftly to the end of board or walk. His head is thrown well back with a haughty air. He puffs out his chest and begins to strut with an air of great importance. Each foot is lifted high and held suspended. With deliberate calmness and gravity it is lowered and one more step is taken. The stroll may last for some time. He makes the turn at the end with superb dignity. He may coax his mate to join him, the two promenaders performing in perfect unison.

When annoyed, the hornero makes a loud monotonous sound. The usual method of communication among them is a succession

of notes uttered with spirit and decision which finally blends into harmonious singing.

When a male meets a female he gives a trilling note of rapture which changes to rapid triplets at the moment they come together. The female bird utters a series of loud measured notes that are in perfect accord with the triplets of the first singer. The two stand facing each other, singing away whole-heartedly, their wings hanging, their tails spread and the first singer trembling all over with the swift notes he is pouring forth. The second bird, in the most attentive attitude, keeps time on the branch with her wings. Then comes the grande finale of the second singer alone, three, perhaps four, exquisite high notes. There is amazing variety in the songs the couple sings. The joyous mates sing their duets every time they rejoin each other, even after a very short absence.

Oven birds begin constructing their plaster house in the autumn. During the mild wet days of winter the work is resumed. If good weather prevails, the dwelling is completed by early spring.

The building material used by these feathered masons is mud mixed with horsehair. This plaster, when baked by the sun, is very durable. It is oven-shaped with a narrow entrance on one side which makes it impossible for a man's hand to reach within. The snug interior is made cozy with dry grass. Five white eggs are laid. The parents share the brooding. These ovens when well anchored to their foundation may last for several years. They are a foot or so in diameter and sometimes quite massive, weighing as much as nine pounds.

The bird upon returning from its free time will notify the brooding mate by a loud joyous



The hornero's oven-shaped nest is made of mud mixed with horsehair and is very durable

call. This is immediately answered by the mate within the nest who rushes out. They sing a duet facing each other before the brooding mate is relieved.

At first the young do not seem to share their parent's happy outlook on life. They nag and are quarrelsome, teasing for food. When they are clothed, everything is changed. They begin to practice thrills and duets and do quite well.

The parents and young remain together for three months. Soon thereafter the latter find their own mates.

Strangely enough, the hornero is the victim of the villain in birddom, the cowbird. The cowbirds of Argentina know how to enter the entrance hall and follow it to the nursery where the female lays her egg. Other cowbirds may try to use the same hornero nest.

In the United States the cowbirds impose on many of the small birds who not only hatch the egg but feed the husky interloper at the expense of their own nestlings. This does not seem to be true of the hornero. The eggs have been found in many ovens, but there is no evidence the owners have ever hatched the cowbirds' eggs.

The horneros live close to their human neighbors, serving them by keeping the insect hordes in check. They are up early in the morning singing their loud, cheerful songs. When the workers come out into the fields, the birds join them, both intent upon their work; eagerly they concentrate on the duties before them, neither interfering with the other.

Caracara of South America.—The caracara is a very valuable citizen of Latin America whose activities have proven beneficial to man. Because he is a scavenger whose mission in life is to keep his chosen territory free from all decaying animal matter, he has been given legal protection.

He keeps down the number of destructive rodents and other small animals. Being quite fond of fish, he may often be seen patrolling river banks where fishermen have tossed fish away, or searching ditches for small dead animals.

Turtles are considered a great treat by him. The caracara

holds them in his strong claws as he flies to the top of a tree. The shell is held firmly while the powerful bill tears the flesh from it. A loud clacking noise made by the bill may be heard for some distance. Later the thoroughly cleaned shell is dropped to the ground.

The caracara on the Mexican coat-of-arms, known as Audubon's Caracara, is found not only in Mexico, Lower California, Central America, Panama, and Cuba, but also in a few states of our own country, namely, Florida, Texas, and Arizona. Being semi-tropical birds, the caracaras remain at home the year around. Other species of the caracara are found in several South American countries.

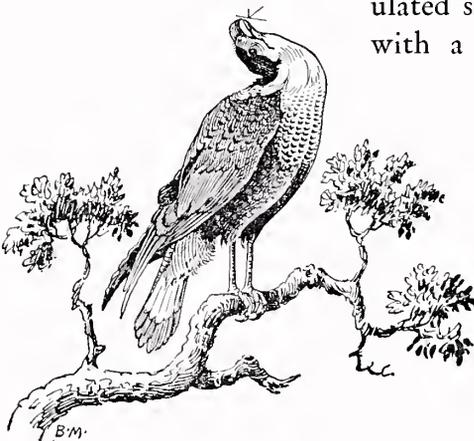
Usually caracaras are silent, except for the warning cry to their mate when prowlers come near the nest. At this time, the note may become a shrill shriek which can be heard for some distance away.

These birds mate for life. The nest is enlarged year after year until it becomes a bulky affair. Many times this nursery is cleverly concealed in the crown of a cabbage palm from seven to forty feet from the ground. The nest usually consists of the slender twigs and fine shreds of the fruiting clusters of palmetto.

Where there are no trees available the nursery will be built on a cliff and these nests, too, are very bulky. The father has his lookout tower in a conspicuous place close to his mate and their young. He is ever ready to defend them against all poachers.

There are two, sometimes three, and rarely four eggs laid. Should anything happen to them, a second or even a third clutch will be laid. They are oval in shape with a smooth or finely granulated shell. The ground color is washed

with a light ochraceous-buff and unmarked, or the almost white ground color will be completely hidden with dark splashes.



The adult caracara has a barred and broadly tipped sepia colored tail and a spotted breast

Incubation lasts twenty-eight days. The young arrive with a beautiful coat of long, thick down with a pink tinge. The crown of the head is dark brown. On each shoulder is a large spot of mummy-brown and a smaller one of the same shade decorates each thigh.

The nestlings are about ten inches long when they are born.

They remain in their nest for two or three months, which indicates that they are cousins of the vultures. They grow fast, demanding fresh meat from dawn until dusk. The natal down begins to disappear as the juvenile plumage grows on the middle of the back, flanks and underparts. The primaries begin to grow. By the time the nestling is almost grown it is nearly feathered though still downy on the sides of the neck and center breast. The tail is sprouting showing the color pattern of the adult which is barred and broadly tipped in sepia instead of black. Finally, the body molt will be accomplished when the spots show on the breast, and the adult feathers on the body and tail. The mature birds

have their complete annual molt in late winter or early spring.

It is not difficult to recognize the caracara in flight. In a way he reminds one of the marsh hawk, turning, rising, and falling. He is graceful and swift, with rapid wing strokes



A five-day-old caracara waits in his nest for fresh meat to be brought to him



A caracara, the national bird of Mexico, in flight

followed by long periods of very straight sailing.

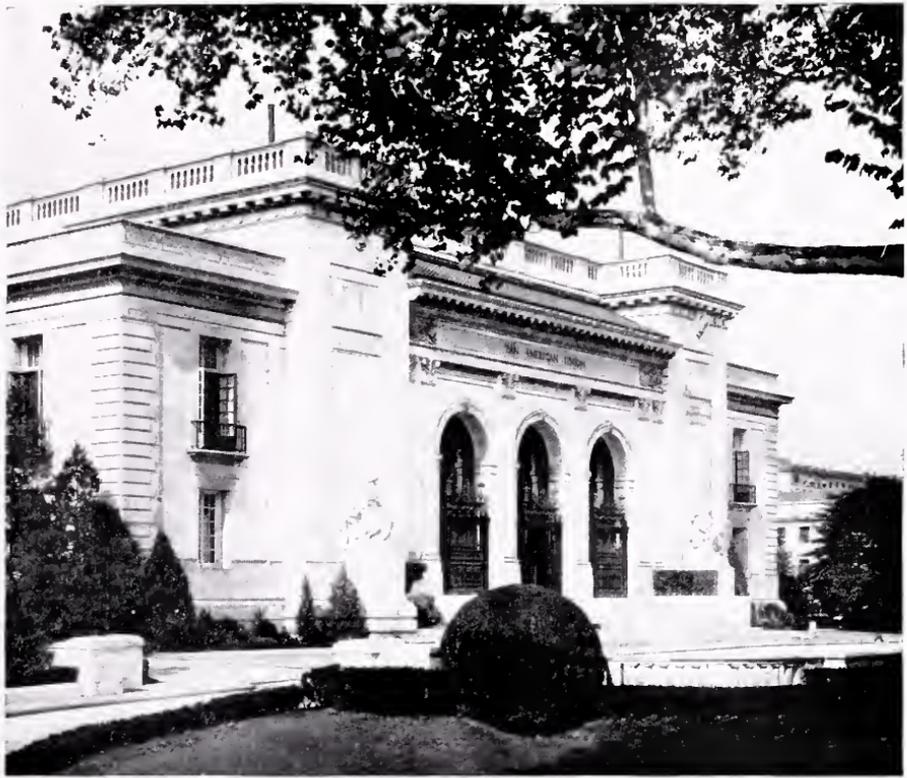
During very hot weather the bird rises high in the sky remaining there until cooler breezes fan away the earth's heat. When hunting or walking, there is a resemblance to the secretary bird. He has a red face and eagle-like bill.

In Texas the caracara has a small and determined foe, the scissor-tailed flycatcher, a hitch-hiker of the air-ways. This bird perches upon his victim's back and pulls out feathers in the "he-loves-me-he-loves me not" fashion. In this jesting mood he departs, strewing the air with more feathers. "He is just teasing," say the ornithologists.

Locally, the caracara is known as the "Mexican Eagle or Mexican Buzzard," both appropriate names because the bird resembles the eagle in its flight and the latter in its feeding habits.



Caracara on the Mexican coat of arms



THE PAN AMERICAN UNION is an international organization maintained by the twenty-one American Republics. It was established in 1890. The purpose of the Pan American Union is to promote peace, commerce and friendship among all the Republics. The Union is supported by annual contributions from all the countries in amounts proportional to population.

The special divisions maintain close relations with private and governmental organizations as well as with individuals in the countries members of the Union. These divisions gather information on foreign trade, health, statistics, education, economics, intellectual cooperation, agriculture, travel, and labor and social information and many other subjects.

Inter-American conferences are organized by the Pan American Union from time to time. Some of these conferences have been held in the Pan American Union building in Washington, D. C.

Pan American Day is celebrated annually throughout the Americas on April 14.

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