

bBr 97.41.2a (18)

1894

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY
Harvard University
The Agassiz Museum ∫ Archives

Caparo.

1894
March 28

A clear fine day -- hot, of course, at noon, but with dry, bracing air.

In the early morning we all turned out to search for the big Goatsucker ("Po-me-one") and Carr quickly found him among the bananas near where I saw him last. He was alive and his only injury seemed to be a broken wing which he must have snapped while flying, for he fell fifty yards or more from the spot where Chapman shot at him. He opened his mouth wide, made a loud squalling somewhat like that of an angry Cat and struck at us with his beak so quickly and violently that it was difficult to control one's nerves sufficiently to receive the blow which, of course, was really quite feeble and harmless. His pupils in the sunlight were scarce larger than a pin head, the irides, which were of a deep chrome yellow, occupying nearly the whole of the great, protruding, staring, expressionless eyes. When we placed the bird on a log, he seemed unable to stand up but the moment we offered him a perch on the top of a small stump he accepted it promptly and pressing his tail against the wood stood as erect as any Hawk or Owl. It is quite evident that this is the bird's normal position and that he cannot or will not perch like our Antrostomus. We took several photographs of him before we killed him.

I spent the remainder of the early morning shooting in the cacao grove near the ajouba, getting a number of common birds and one new to me -- a Pachyramphus nigra, female.

Caparo.

1894
March 29

Early morning clear. Remainder of day, cloudy with frequent heavy showers of fine rain and very humid and oppressive atmosphere.

For ten days or more, we have seen few Hummers in the cacao grove. This has been doubtless due to the fact that a good many bois immortal trees have been in bloom in the groves and many poey trees in the woods. The poey is out of bloom again and we have only one bois immortal in full blossom. To this Hummers came to-day in considerable numbers, although there were never more than four or five in the tree at any one time; but I noticed that these kept changing. I shot five or six specimens, for the tree stands within a few yards of our ajouba and I could easily slip out and back between the showers. I noticed that when it began raining the Hummers all ceased feeding and perched until the shower was over, often in the bois immortal tree and not as a rule under the shelter of thick foliage.

There were a good many Jacobins this morning and I had a fine chance to watch them. They are by far the most showy as well as the most animated and interesting of the species which visit the cacao grove. At times they seem to become perfectly frenzied with excitement and dart hither and thither through the trees or mount high above them and dash madly about in zig-zag courses. Both males

and females act in this way and often when no other bird is near. Once this morning I saw a male Jacobin showing off before his mate. Both were rather high in air (50 or 60 feet) over the clearing, but not far from the bois immortal grove. The female was flitting about and poising, perhaps catching small insects. The male would rise about 20 feet above her and, darting down, sweep just over her back, then rise and plunge again, describing very nearly the swing of a pendulum. All the while he kept his tail spread to its fullest extent, showing the white very conspicuously. The white on the nape was also displayed to remarkable advantage, flashing in the sunlight whenever the bird turned it towards me. I am beginning to learn the notes of the Hummers here. Eucephala and Glaucis made a shrill Fringiline zeep, Florisuga mellivoria and Agyrtria chinopretus -- a soft, full tsup very like the chirp of a Warbler.

Early in the morning I shot a female Bell Bird in a bois immortal which stands within a few yards of our ajouba and late in the afternoon a fine male White-headed Manakin in a thicket not ten yards from our work bench. The Manakin made his sharp whirring several times as Chapman and I stood watching him.

In the evening I walked up the road to the woods and shot a couple of Bats. I also saw a small Goatsucker (Lurocalis) which rose straight upward against the sky, caught an insect, turned and plunged downward into the gloom before I could fire.

At daybreak this morning the Monkeys roared much nearer to the house than we have before heard them. Carr said that they were within a mile of us. We could distinctly hear the different notes of the roar, whereas previously it has been merely ^{a medley} of sound. The opening notes sounded like bub-bub-bub-bub-bub, followed by a prolonged roar. Mr. Chapman suggested that the general effect was not unlike that of a number of hogs when about to be fed. Carr agreed to this but it did not strike me as a happy comparison, although I could make out a slight resemblance.

For the past four or five evenings we have heard in the high woods near the road a prolonged screeching which almost exactly resembles the sound of a distant steam whistle. This is made by a Cicada which is called the "six o'clock bug". It begins very regularly within ten minutes of 6 P. M. and continues until dark or later. Near at hand one hears a short prelude to the whistle, consisting first of a low slow rattle and then of a frying sound which runs directly into the screech.

Caparo.

1894
March 30

A fine day with strong breeze, the sky filled with trade wind clouds as it always is at this season, but no rain.

I spent most of the early morning and the whole of the forenoon taking photographs. Sam accompanied me along the Trogon Trace and cut down a number of small trees so that I could get the nests of Ostinops on the hill beyond the brook. The strong wind was a serious obstacle but there are always short intervals of nearly or quite dead calm in the windiest weather here.

These woods were swarming with hunting ants to-day, an immense army of these creatures having invaded them since our last visit. They were making thorough work, ascending all the trees and sending strong detachments into every nook and corner. We had to step carefully to avoid the streams, three or four inches across, which poured over the ground in every direction. As usual, they had attracted numbers of Dendrocinis. I saw five of these birds in one tree and heard their calls on every side. They kept flying down to the ground sometimes hovering just above the streams of ants, sometimes alighting for a moment. I repeatedly saw them pick up something but, not having my gun, I was unable to settle the mooted question as to whether they were eating the ants themselves or the insects which the ants disturbed.

I find my time here all too brief. One might spend a full month -- or a year, for that matter -- very profitably and pleasantly, studying ants alone.

While making some photographs near the bridge this morning a little after sunrise, I was fortunate enough to have a fine view of a King Vulture. Indeed, the noble bird kept appearing and disappearing over the woods for half-an-hour or more at intervals. At one time it came nearly over me and within one hundred yards. It appeared to be wholly white beneath, save for a broad dark band across each wing. The head looked brown. There was a good deal of white on the back. The tail and wings were very broad and the tail was kept widely spread most of the time. The bird was soaring in broad circles. Its flight was more nearly like that of an Eagle than of a Vulture. A Turkey Buzzard which was with the King Vulture most of the time appeared much the smaller of the two.

When I returned to dinner at 3 P. M. I found that the Carrs had brought in a pair of Quawks (Peccaries) which they had killed within about two miles of the house. They started them very near the balata tree on Trogon Trace and the dogs ran them about two miles before they stood at bay. Arthur Carr killed one by thrusting a pointed stick (which he cut and sharpened while running after the dogs) down its throat -- a common method here. Hutton shot the other. He had probably filled the muzzle of

his gun with mud during the mad chase for it burst, at the muzzle, fortunately, and without harm to anything but the poor Quank. These Peccaries have peculiar, deep sunken eyes. Otherwise they are typical Hogs.

Late in the afternoon I walked up the road taking my gun as usual but not intending to shoot anything unless a rare bird offered. The "six o'clock" Cicada began shrieking just as I left the house and when I reached the edge of the woods the sun had sunk below the horizon and the whole of the open country to the eastward was illumined by the amber light of the after-glow which is so constant a feature of the sunsets here. A few birds were singing -- Diplopteryx, Thamnophilus major, et doliatus, a Trogon or two, and a House Wren. These tropical birds do not, however, sing nearly so much at evening as in the early morning. Every now and then a huff-huff-huff-huff like the distant puffing of a locomotive would attract my attention to one of the big Corn-birds (Ostinops) flying high overhead on his way to some distant roost. This sound is made by the bird's wings and is a regular accompaniment of its heavy, direct flight which is much like that of Quiscalus aeneus. The ordinary call of Ostinops is also exceedingly like the cac of our Grackle.

Very soon after sunset and before twilight had begun to fall -- indeed, at the time when the amber light was most intense -- a multitude of Swifts and Bats appeared

over the clearing and began darting about in every direction, feeding. They appear regularly every evening but their relative as well as aggregate numbers vary greatly on different evenings. Last evening there were about ten Bats to one Swift; this evening the Swifts were by far the more numerous of the two. The Bats are all of one species (Molossus rufus) and it is interesting to see how closely they resemble the Swifts in general appearance and especially in their flight which is quite as direct and if anything even more rapid than that of the Swifts. Their wings make a strong rushing sound which can be heard at fully 100 yards distance when the air is still. When shooting these Bats, we actually find it difficult to distinguish them from the Swifts in time to fire before the creature has passed beyond gun range. Swifts and Bats always appear together and with great suddenness. You look about in every direction and not one is to be seen. The next moment there are hundreds dashing about in every direction, at first low down, afterwards 100 feet or more above the earth. The greater number remain in sight only some fifteen or twenty minutes. They leave a few at a time and do not appear to go in any particular direction. A very few of the Bats linger until it is nearly dark, rising higher and higher as the shades of night deepen.

While watching the Swifts and Bats this evening, I suddenly saw among them what I at first took to be a gigantic Swift. It was flying in a great circle, moving its wings with that rapid, vibrating motion so characteristic of the Swift's flight. It appeared to be somewhat larger than a Martin and had a large head and a short tail. After circling a few times, it made off over the woods, when the whole throng of Swifts and Bats started after it with shrill twittering and squeaking. Hutton, who was with me, at once pronounced it to be a "Bat Hawk" and said that it preyed wholly on Bats and Swifts. I could not at the time believe that it was really a bird of prey but Hutton proved to be right for the singular-looking creature presently returned and, pitching down from a great height, alighted on a dead stub where I shot it. It turned out to be a male Falco rufigularis, by far the most beautiful Hawk that I have ever killed. According to Leotand it is a crepuscular species, spending the day in the forest and coming out into the open country only after sunset. Leotand also says that it feeds exclusively on Bats, but this specimen was plucking a bird when shot for we distinctly saw the feathers floating about its perch in the still air. Probably the bird was a Swift, but although we saw it fall, we could not find it under the tree.

Returning to the edge of the woods, I waited there for some time in hopes of seeing the Goatsucker (Lurocalis). At length he appeared, flying straight down the road, but before I could cock my gun he was nearly out of range and I missed him. Shortly afterwards I heard him call a number of times in the banana plantation where, as nearly as I could make out, he was sitting on a prostrate log. The call is exceedingly like that of the small, sweet-voiced evening frog which is so common here. Indeed, it appears to differ only in that it is repeated three or four times in quick succession, whereas the frog calls only once at a time. It may be written whee-whee-whee-whee.

It was nearly dark when we started for home. At the point where the road enters the cacao grove, I saw two of the peculiar slow-flying Bats which Chapman has thus far tried in vain to obtain. They do not come out until it is too dark to see to shoot and they fly so low that one cannot get them out of the gloom except when directly overhead and only a few yards from the gun. I was vainly attempting to shoot one when a much larger Bat came rushing swiftly overhead and I brought it down with a broken wing. It was a vicious creature and when approached jumped up at us, clashing its teeth which gleamed in the darkness, as we both thought, with a phosphorescent light. Its shrill squawking attracted several others of the same kind, who dashed directly at our

heads apparently, passing within a foot or less of our faces. I tried to shoot another but the light was too poor. This specimen measured 22 inches in alar extent.

The Owls these dark nights hoot or screech only in the evening and morning twilight but to-night at about 9 o'clock we heard a Barn Owl very near the house. Its cry seemed to me much like that of a young child. It is the only time we have heard it here.

The superb big fireflies are also rather crepuscular than nocturnal, for I rarely see them after it is fairly dark. As they wave to and fro through the cacao grove, they light up the ground beneath almost as brightly as would a small lantern.

Caparo.

1894
March 31

I spent the forenoon skinning the Hawk and some Hummingbirds which I shot in a flowering bois immortel nearly over the ajoupa. They came to this tree in great numbers to-day but nearly all ^[were] the common Eucephala caerulea and Agyrtria chionipectus with a good sprinkling of Lampornis violicauda. Of the last, I see at least six females to one male, whereas the males of Eucephala apparently outnumber the females in the proportion of ten or a dozen to one. One fine male Jacobin came into the tree but he only stayed a moment.

Late in the afternoon I went up the road with my gun. I shot three Bats (Molossus) soon after sunset and later, when it had become nearly dark, one of the small, slow-flying Bats which Chapman has been so anxious to identify. It proved to be a Saccopteryx -- a pretty little creature with two white stripes on the back.

Chapman has been laid up for three days with a bad boil on his leg.

Caparo.

1894
April 1

A beautiful day, very clear with less wind than usual.

We were busily engaged in packing from morning to night for we must send our luggage to Chapman's by cart to-morrow.

At evening I went up the road as usual to see the sunset which was remarkably beautiful. There were few Bats or Swifts but I saw the Lurocalis flying low over the banana plantation.

Caparo.

1894
April 2

Another remarkably fine day with few clouds and but little wind.

As we were drinking coffee early this morning a Bell Bird began bok-ing on the hill near the road. We could hear it very distinctly from the house, which is about 400 yards distant.

Arthur Carr started off before daylight to hunt for Howling Monkeys. He returned at about 9 o'clock with a fine pair which he killed from a band of five. They were about the cleanest animals which have been brought in during our stay here, being apparently wholly free from ticks, red bugs, fleas or other vermin. Their finger and toe nails were as neatly kept as possible and black with a high polish. The beard of the male was of a rich purplish chestnut. The eyes of both were light hazel and rather gentle and intelligent in expression. We cooked some of the flesh of the female and found it excellent.-- very like tender beef. At ten o'clock I started out with the camera, crossing the river and following the old trace to the figiuer tree of which I made two pictures. I took in all ten, most of them studies of the trunks and foliage.

I saw a fine pair of Toucans which were unusually tame, permitting me to stand directly beneath them for

ten minutes or more, although they were in a small tree about 35 feet above the ground. One of them held a large berry in the tip of its bill but it would not either drop it or swallow it while I was watching it. Both birds sat in rather crouching attitudes. They rolled their heads from side to side much in the manner of Vireos but on the whole they reminded me most of Jays, especially in their movement when hopping from twig to twig.

A frequent and characteristic sound in these tropical woods is that of the falling of heavy fruit which comes down every few minutes, crashing through the leaves and striking the ground with great force. Perhaps the largest and heaviest is the fruit of the Cannon Ball Tree. Each fruit is as large as a coconut and weighs seven or eight pounds.

Studying the foliage carefully this morning, I became satisfied that if one excludes the palms (which are nowhere at all numerous or conspicuous in the primitive forest) and the parasitic plants (Calladurus[?], etc.) the leaves are, almost without exception, smaller than at the North. Another fact which interests me is that here and there one sees leaves fully ripe and about to fall which are colored with what we should call autumn tints and the ground under some of the trees is strewn with yellow, crimson or russet leaves that have recently fallen and among which the

foot rustles pleasantly, recalling October at home. There is, however, no leaf mould nor any matted and decaying leaves even in the densest woods. The ants and the rapid action of heat and moisture make quick work here. Few stumps or fallen logs last more than six years and many disappear within three years after they fall or are cut down. Hence the woods and older clearings are remarkably free from stumps and fallen logs -- a fact which doubtless explains the comparative scarcity of Woodpeckers when these grand old forests are compared with those in the wilder parts of the United States. In the recent clearings, however, one sees many tall bleached or fire-charred stumps like those on our southern plantations.

At evening I went, for the last time, up the road to the high woods near the bridge. There were few Swifts or Bats. Tinamous and a Coq-bois were calling. As twilight deepened, the Lurocalis came within four feet of my head and then flew up and down the road hawking for insects. The little Junco Birds (Glaucidium) were very noisy for a short time after sunset and later I heard the Cooker er-r-r-coo Owl and the Owl that calls hoo, hoo, hoo, ho. The little frogs that say oui so sweetly were out in great force this evening and the big tree toads by the river clattered at frequent intervals up to about eight o'clock. But after night has fairly set in and when there is no moonlight we hear but few sounds save the chirping and shrilling of crickets and grasshoppers.