

Interview with a Fool Hen

Natural History

W. T. HORNADAY, in *Wild Animal Interviews* (Scribner's):

I never before had met those birds, and I knew that they didn't know me, but they were absolutely unsuspecting and unafraid. They were fool-hens. The men of the Rocky Mountains call them that because those birds do not know how merciless and deadly men are, and therefore do not at once fly from man's baneful presence. If you pretend that you are harmless and friendly, sometimes you can slowly walk up to a fool-hen, near enough to kill it with a stick.

Without any stick or other evil-mindedness I slowly walked toward the nearest Franklin grouse—a handsome male bird in his fine, new, fall plumage. Without a flutter of wings he sat there and actually permitted me to come within seven feet of him. And he sat on a limb not an inch more than six feet from the needle-covered, sweet-smelling forest floor.

"Well, simp," said I affably, "what in the world are you thinking of that you don't make a good getaway?"

"Why should I? I don't fly half a mile from every bear and skunk that comes near me, so why should I fly clear away from my feeding grounds just for you? You have no big teeth nor long claws."

"But has no one ever told you that two-legged man is the deadliest animal there is toward all birds that permit him to come close to them?"

"No," said he calmly. "No one ever mentioned it to me. What does man do to birds like me? I'm not a wild animal with horns, or a furry hide."

"Well," I said, "he kills you with shot-guns, rifles and revolvers; and many a foolish grouse is knocked to death by a stone or a stick."

"I want to know!" exclaimed Simp slowly.

"You fool-hens," I continued, "are victims of misplaced confidence. All of your mountain relations are so dull and stupid about man that they actually seem demented. Even after a man begins to shoot or to throw stones at one of you, you'll just sit there as if glued to the branch until at last a bullet or a stone gets you. You fellows don't know enough to grasp a new idea until you are in the frying pan."

"I guess it's because we don't un-

derstand why we ought to feel scared, and why we should fly away. But honestly, sir, I never dreamed that you could be more deadly than a skunk or grizzly bear, or that you could be mean enough to keep on attacking a poor foolish bird after it had shown its confidence in your sense of right and wrong, and your goodness of heart."

"Goodness of fiddlesticks!" I exclaimed, peevishly. "Out in the wilds there ain't no goodness of heart in men toward the wild birds and beasts and fishes." (That was a little too strong, but I was some wrought up.)

"That may be true of you men," said the grouse, "but not of the wild creatures. We give one another a square deal. It's our rule to live and let live. But apparently we do need to turn over a new leaf about men. Now, what would you, as a friend of the fool-hens, advise us to do?"

"Well," said I, "first off, quickly pass the word around that man is the most dangerous animal that roams the earth; that every man, boy and baby-in-arms must be ticketed 'dangerous,' and that every grouse, big and little, must fly whenever he appears. And you must be quick about it, too. Learn from the ruffed grouse of the East. He knows men. When he suddenly meets a loaded man on a trail he don't hop up to a lower limb, in plain sight, and sit there as an easy mark to be murdered in cold blood. No, sir!"

"What does he do?" queried the fool-hen, with interest.

"He leaps high up, explodes in the air like a bomb, scares the man out of his wits, and with a roaring burr and whirr he goes rocketing off through the timber at sixty miles an hour. Just why he doesn't knock his brains out against half a dozen trees at once I never could make out. And nine times out of ten he saves his bacon."

"There's risk in that plan," said Simp, "but it's better to take it than to leave it and be killed. Really, I must at once get busy and tell all my people what you say, and start a reform. Our grouse mothers must teach the wisdom of the ruffed grouse to all their children, and bring them up right."

"Now you are on the right track!" I said. "This 'fool-hen' business has gone far enough."

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The Buffalo Passes

Mammalogy

E. DOUGLAS BRANCH, in *The Hunting of the Buffalo* (Appleton):

There must once have been thirty million buffaloes roaming a vast range of American prairies and forests; when Grover Cleveland was moving into the White House a second time, there were about a thousand and ninety, and nearly all of these were in far northern fastnesses or in captivity. The thirty million had been hunted down—hunted, shot, pierced, impounded, tricked, for the fun of it, for the money in it, for the necessity of it. It was an awful, epic hunt—story that demands to be told honestly and dispassionately, or not at all.

The range of the buffalo included the Mississippi delta, the Pennsylvania mountains, Northern Mexico, the upper shores of Great Slave Lake; it enveloped nearly two-fifths of the entire area of North America. The restriction of this range, gradual, then suddenly ruthless; the coming of new peoples who hunted; the ways, the tools, the laws of the hunt: that is the meat of this narrative. Naturally, emphasis is given that loud, lusty frontier of the eighteen-seventies and eighteen-eighties, when the western herd of over seven million buffaloes was shattered and annihilated, and barely eighty scarred fugitives were left. This buffalo hunters' frontier sprang up with so little warning, and collapsed with such inglorious speed, that it has missed its share of attention; the history of the buffalo hunt is almost as scattered as the buffalo bones left to moulder on the prairies.

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A porcupine quill is fitted with almost 1,000 tiny barbs that make it a most unpleasant weapon.

Seeds sown by women grow better than seeds sown by men, according to an old Indian belief.

Monuments and remains of ancient civilization in Egypt probably exceed in bulk all those of the rest of the ancient eastern world, according to Dr. James H. Breasted, of the Oriental Institute.

There are not more than 500,000 foreigners living in China, exclusive of Mongols and Korean settlers, whereas there are more than 10,000,000 Chinese living abroad, according to consular estimate.