



This water ouzel, carrying food to its young, posed gracefully — although unknowingly — for Author-Photographer Ken Legg at the entrance to its nest in the butt of an old log left high and dry on a dam by last year's winter floods.

DISTURBER IS FINED

Martin Cervantes, 43, a native of Irapuato, Mex., who cannot speak English, was fined \$25 Friday morning by Municipal Judge James J. Scopettone after he pleaded guilty to a charge of disturbing the peace. Officer Dave Esty of the Capitola police department arrested the man last Wednesday at 11:44 p.m. at the intersection of 41st and Capitola avenues "in a drunken condition."

Along The Trail

by
ken legg

The water ouzel is a remarkable bird. It swims like a duck, dives like a grebe, sings like a thrush, and builds a nest like a wren, yet it is none of these. It is a plain, gray bird that lives along clear mountain streams and has more charm and interest than many of the more highly colored birds.

One who encounters the ouzel is usually walking along a stream suitable for trout, because, if the water isn't clear, cold, pure and rushing enough to support trout it's no good for ouzels. We may first detect this water-loving bird in one of two ways.

If we have been blundering and splashing upstream we will probably hear a series of sharp "bzeet" notes, and upon looking up will see the ouzel flitting upstream. Should we be moving cautiously along, the plump form may be detected upon some rock in the stream or on a log. The chances are it will be bobbing up and down like a puppet in a rapid curtesy act. Because of his habit of executing these gymnastics he is also called the dipper.

It is a rather strange place to expect to find a bird, unless it be a duck, and this bird is certainly no duck. But even stranger things may happen. He may fall into a pool of water and begin swimming upon the surface, although the feet are not webbed. Or, he may dive under the water, fly about beneath the surface, or even walk upon the bottom.

Such is the life of this denizen of the rushing western streams. He is probably under water to catch aquatic insects, for these constitute his principal food. Certain competitors of his, fishermen especially, claim that

the ouzel takes trout fry.

I spent two days watching a nest last spring and saw the parents make dozens of feeding trips to the nest. I was standing 10 feet from the nest and could easily see the food items as they were given to the nestlings. Only once was a fish brought, and with all the preparation required, I can easily see why they didn't bring more.

The fish had to be minced before being given to the young, and the parent stood upon a rock and slammed the fish against the hard surface for half an hour. He would pick it up by the tail, bang it against the rock, lay it down and take hold of the head, then start slamming it against the rock again. This went on for nearly 30 minutes; by the time the operation was finished the prey was thoroughly minced and mangled, and was given to one of the young ouzels. Incidentally, I have seen kingfishers do the same thing.

Finding of the nest was an experience. A friend told me that he knew where he thought there was an ouzel nest. He had read the same books I have and these usually placed them behind waterfalls or where spray would fall upon the moss-covered structure. He couldn't accompany me, and said it was behind the water of a falls.

I made my way upstream to the place described, sat down on a rock and waited. I didn't have to wait long; an ouzel flew across the dam with an insect sticking out of his bill and went directly to a splintered log that had been left hanging on the concrete by last winter's flood.

Surprise and incredulity were my reactions, for I too had expected to see him duck beneath the waterfall. Previous accounts to the contrary, here was a big ball of brown moss high and dry above the water and stuck in the end of a tattered log-butt. It was six feet above a pool and receiving no moisture although this supposedly was a requisite for ouzel nest locations.

The pool was shallow enough for me to wade and before the day was over I was sitting on another log. My camera was a foot from the nest and the adults were climbing up the tripod legs and going to the nest to feed their three youngsters.

Sitting, as I was, only 10 feet away (at the end of a 10-foot cable release) it was possible to study the birds at close range for the first time. I was able to see the white membrane that curtains the eye when the bird is underwater (at least that is thought to be its purpose).

The plumage coloration, (bluish-gray), the rather long bill, and the short tail were noted, as well as the flesh-colored legs. Probably an entomologist could have identified the larvae being brought. For two days I sat, or lay, on a log over the pool and listened to the roar of the dam and the singing of the ouzels. I wish I could have camped with them.

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