

## Canadian Natural History.

## The Raven.

(Corvus carnivorus, Batram.)

This is the largest and most powerful species of the *Corvidæ* or crow family. It has every member fully and strongly developed, and when in full plumage, is a beautiful and almost noble-looking bird. There is, however, a suspicious wariness about the expression



of the Raven, that produces an unfavourable idea, and is in marked contrast to the frank and open daring, seen in the carriage of many raptorial birds. This opinion would seem to have been handed down from antiquity; for long before natural history was reduced to a science; "the evil-boding crow"—"infausta cornix"—found a place in many savage superstitions, or served as the emblem of bad fortune in the tales of the historian, or in the imagery of the poet.

The European Raven (*corvus corax*) bears a close resemblance to the bird we are describing, and by some authorities, the two have been regarded as identical. Audubon looks upon them as the same, while some modern writers consider them distinct. Without presuming to decide so nice a question, we may just remark that the European and American species resemble each other so closely in every particular of size, shape, and disposition, that, not improbably, modern writers on ornithology have drawn a distinction where a difference did not really exist.

The Raven prefers a mountainous range of country, though at the same time, when in pursuit of food, it frequents cultivated districts, and even the vicinity of towns. Generally, it is seen alone or in pairs, but after the breeding season, it may occasionally be observed in small flocks. "The flight is rapid, elevated, and protracted, often soaring for hours at a time, at a great height. On the ground, the gait is grave and dignified, with frequent opening of the wings." Its favourite breeding haunts are precipitous rocks, either on the sea-coast or inland. The nest is formed of an immense mass of sticks, warmly and compactly lined inside with hair or wool, and securely placed on some projecting shelf or ledge; or if, on the face of the cliff, some aged and time-worn tree still remain, and can afford a sufficient resting-place for the heavy fabric, it is sometimes selected. In general, however,

the rock itself is preferred. The Raven is omnivorous but by preference, carnivorous, delighting in the flesh of small animals of every kind, as well as eggs, young birds, carrion, dead fish, mollusks, crustaceans, and insects. Dr. Richardson speaking of its habits in the fur countries says, "The experienced native, when he sees from afar a flock of Ravens wheeling in small circles, knows that a party of his countrymen, well provided with venison, are encamped on the spot, or that a band of wolves are preying on the carcass of some of the larger quadrupeds, and pushes on

briskly, in the certain prospect of having his wants supplied.

When reared from the nest, the Raven becomes extremely familiar, and in a stable or court-yard is of some service in destroying rats. Its instinct, however, does not teach it selection, and accordingly young puppies, or early poultry, are not respected more than vermin. There is little difference between the sexes except in size, the male being slightly larger and having the lanceolate feathers in the head and neck longer, and more marked, in the light of plumage, during the breeding season its clear and dark glossy plumage, with brilliant steel-blue or purplish reflections, render it a beautiful object to the naturalist.

The thieving propensities and cunning of the Raven are proverbial; and many authors have related anecdotes of its wonderful intellectual powers. Captain McClure, the well-known Arctic voyager, relates the following. "Two ravens," he says, "once established themselves as friends of the family in Mercer Bay, living mainly by what little scraps the men might have thrown away after meal times. The ship's dog, however, looked upon them as his especial perquisites and exhibited considerable energy in maintaining his rights against the Ravens; who, nevertheless, outwitted him in a way which amused every one. Observing that he appeared quite willing to make a mouthful of their own sable persons, they used to throw themselves intentionally in his way just as the mess-tins were being cleared out on the dust heap outside the ship. The dog would immediately run at them, and they would just fly a few yards; the dog then made another run, and again they would appear to escape him but by an inch, and so on, until they had tempted and provoked him to the shore a considerable distance off. Then the Ravens would make a direct flight for the ship, and had generally done good

execution before the morosely-looking dog detected the impostor on that had been practised upon him, and rushed back again."

The Raven is celebrated for its longevity, some instances being on record where the bird has attained the age of one hundred years.

## Wild Sheep of Thibet.

Leaving Jadung, we struck off in a northerly direction, still following the course of the small river along whose sides we had ascended into Thibet, and arrived at its source—a dark, copperish-looking pool of about forty square yards in extent, situated in a complete 'cal de sac' of hills. The water in the pool was intensely cold, and seemed of great depth. Along its edges were numerous petrifications, consisting of the skulls and horns of burrel and "Ovis ammon," some of them most perfect in form and shape. The Ovis ammon is a gigantic species of wild sheep, peculiar to Thibet, but not numerous. They are seldom met with lower than fifteen thousand feet, their usual habitat being at a much higher elevation. We were not fortunate enough whilst hunting in this direction to procure a specimen of these extraordinary animals and only saw a few at an immense distance on an open plain, where there was not the least possible chance of being able to get near them, but we fell in with others on another occasion. The native name for them is "nean." In height they are between fourteen and fifteen hands, the female being thirteen hands high. They are, of all wild animals, the most shy and keen of sight, and possess great powers of smell. The pursuit of them is attended with more difficulty than that of any other game. On being disturbed they go off at a tremendous speed, gradually subsiding into a walk, but not stopping for miles until quite out of sight. They are supposed to be identical with the Siberian "argali" and the "bighorn" or Rocky Mountain sheep in California. In colour they are of a reddish grey, with patches of white about the neck and breast. Their coats are short, thickly set, and brittle like the burrel; legs long and slender, with large knee-joints. Their horns are of great size, and curved like a ram's; when full grown they average 15 in. to 24 in. in circumference at the base, and from 4 in. to 5 in. round the curve. Those of the female are considerably less in size being only 10 in. or 12 in. in circumference, and from 15 in. to 24 in. in length. The bunchour or wild yak, the kiang or wild horse, were not to be found in the quarter we were hunting in at this time; but when we were proceeding in a north-easterly course, endeavouring to cross over a pass that had never been attempted by Europeans, before we passed through the district in which they are met with.

The "Ovis polii," another variety of the wild sheep species, supposed to be even larger than the Ovis ammon, is said to exist in the extreme northern parts of Thibet, and is also found in Bokhara, on the elevated plain of Pamir, eastward of Bokhara, where it is called by the natives "Rasse."—ROBIN, in *The Field*.

## Peculiar Fish.

"We have," says Sir Charles Bell, a curious instance of the precision of the eye and of the adaption of muscular action, in the beaked chetodon, a fish which inhabits the Indian rivers, and lives on the smaller aquatic flies. When it observes one alighted upon a twig, or flying over (for it can shoot them on the wing), it darts a drop of water with so steady an aim as to bring the fly down into the water, when it falls an easy prey. It will hit a fly at the distance of from three to six feet. Another fish of the same order, the *zeus*, has the power of forming its mouth into a tube, and squirting at flies, so as to encumber their wings, and bring them to the surface of the water. In these instances, a difficult y will readily occur to the reader. How does the fish judge of position, since the rays of light are refracted at the surface of the water? Does instinct enable it to do this, or is it by experience?"

Now, Sir Charles Bell was one of the closest observers and the most trustworthy writers of his time, so that his authority is unquestionable.