



### BIRDS AND BEASTS ON SABLE ISLAND.

If you will take your atlas and turn to the map of Canada, you may, by looking very carefully, discover a small spot in the Atlantic Ocean almost due east from Nova Scotia, and close beside the sixtieth parallel of longitude. This little lonely spot is Sable Island. There it lies in the midst of the waves, a long, low bank of gray sand without a single tree upon it from end to end; nay, not so much as a bush behind which a baby might play hide-and-seek. It seems, therefore, at first sight to be one of the most unfavorable places in the world for the study of either birds or beasts. Yet, strange as it may seem, this island, which is now but twenty miles long and at its greatest breadth but a mile and a half wide,—once it was quite double that size,—has a wonderfully interesting history of its own, of which not the least entertaining chapter is that relating to its furry and feathered inhabitants.

Although when first viewed from the sea, Sable Island appears to be nothing better than a barren sand-bank, on closer acquaintance it reveals inside its sloping beaches, vales and meadows that in summer-time seem like bits out of a Western prairie. There are green, grassy knolls, and enchanting dells with placid ponds in their midst, and if you only come at the right time and stay long enough, you may gather pink roses, blue lilies, China asters, wild pea, gay golden-rod, and, what is still better, strawberries, blueberries and cranberries in bountiful profusion.

Our concern at present, however, is not with the fruits and flowers, but with the fur and feathers of this curious place.

Seeing that Sable Island has no trees on the branches of which nests may be built, it follows naturally that its winged inhabitants are altogether of the water-fowl and sea-bird variety. All over the sides and tops of the sand-hills, which rise to the height of thirty, forty, or fifty feet, the gulls, gannets, terns and other aquatic birds scrape together their miserable apologies for nests, and hatch out their ugly little squab chicks, making such a to-do about the business that the whole air is filled with their chattering, clanging and screaming.

They are indeed very disagreeable neighbors, for, besides the horrid din they are ceaselessly making, they are the most untidy, not to say filthy, of housekeepers. After they have occupied their bird barracks, as their nesting-places might appropriately be called, for a few weeks, the odor the wind bears from that direction could never be mistaken for one of those spicy breezes which are reputed to "blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle."

Then they have not the redeeming quality of being fit to eat, for, unless one were on the very edge of starvation, one taste of their flesh, rank with suggestions

of fish and train-oil, would be sufficient to banish all appetite.

They have one or two good qualities. They are brave, for at the peril of their lives, they will dauntlessly attack any rash intruder upon their domains, swooping down upon him with sharp cries and still sharper beaks.

Their movements illustrate the poetry of motion, as they come sailing grandly in from the ocean spaces, and circle about their own particular hillock in glorious dips and curves and mountings upward, that fill the human observer with longing and envy.

Much more satisfactory, however, are the black duck, sheldrake, plover, curlew and snipe which nest, by uncounted thousands, in the dense grass that girts the freshwater ponds, and afford dainty dishes for the table. It is easy

work to make a fine bag on a favorable day, and grand sport may be had by anyone who knows how to handle a double-barrel.

Many are the interesting stories connected with bird-life on Sable Island, but a single one, and that the oddest of them all, must suffice. I give it upon the unimpeachable authority of Dr. J. Bernard Gilpin.

About forty years or more ago a lot of rabbits were sent there as an experiment. The idea was, if they prospered, to furnish the human inhabitants of the island with a pleasant variety from the salt junk which generally adorned their tables.

The experiment succeeded admirably. Bunny found the firm, dry sands just the thing for his burrows, while the abundant wild pea and other herbage furnished unstinted food for his prolific brood. But one fateful day in spring,—a dark day in the annals of rabbitdom,—a big snowy owl, that had somehow lost his bearings and been driven out to sea by a western gale, dropped wearily upon the island to rest his tired pinions.

While sitting on a sand-heap, thankful at his escape from a watery grave, he looked about him, and to his amazed delight beheld—of all sights the most welcome in the world to a hungry owl—rabbits! Rabbits young and rabbits old, rabbits plump and rabbits lean, rabbits in sixes and rabbits in sevens were frisking about in the long grass and over the sand, merrily innocent of their peril.

At first Sir Owl could scarcely believe his eyes for it was a bright, sunny day, and owls cannot see very well when the sun is shining; but presently, as he still squatted on the sand, perfectly motionless except his eyelids blinking solemnly, a thoughtless little rabbit, which had grown too much excited over a game of chase with his brother to look where he was going, ran up against the bewildered bird.

This awoke the owl thoroughly. With a quick spring that sent all the other little cotton-tails scampering off to their burrows in wild affright, he fastened his long claws in the back of his unfortunate disturber, and without even stopping to say grace, made a dinner off him on the spot.

That was a red-letter day in the owl's calendar. Thenceforth he revelled in rabbit for breakfast, dinner and supper, and had he been a very greedy owl, might have kept his discovery of a rabbit bonanza all to himself; but he didn't. With a splendid unselfishness, which some bipeds without feathers might advantageously imitate, he had no sooner recruited his strength than off he posted to the mainland to spread the good news.

Four days later he came back, but not alone this time. Bearing him company were his brothers, his sisters, his cousins, his uncles and his aunts in such numbers

that ere the summer ended there was not a solitary bunny left upon the island!

Since then the place has been restocked and there having been no return of the owls, the rabbits, despite the fact that great numbers of them are killed for food, have so multiplied as to become a positive nuisance, and the experience of Australia being in view, the advisability of their extermination is seriously considered.

Beside the rabbits there have been; at different times, the following animals upon Sable Island, viz: the black fox, white bear, walrus and seals; wild horses, cattle and swine; rats, cats and dogs. This makes quite a long list. Of course so small and bare an island could never have held them all at once. Nor were they all ever there together.

Now they are all gone except the rabbits, the horses, of which several hundred still scamper wild over the sand dunes, and the seals, which come every year to introduce their shiny little whelps into the world, and to grow fat on the fish hurled continually upon the beach by the tireless breakers.

It is a great many years since the black fox, white bear and walrus were last seen upon the island. Too much money could be made out of them when dead for the fishermen, who knew of their presence, to let them live long; and so with powder and shot and steel they were ruthlessly exterminated. The beautiful skins of the black fox, worth one hundred golden crowns each, went principally to France where they were made up into splendid robes for royalty.

Just how the wild horses and cattle found their way to Sable Island is not positively known.

They were first heard of in those early days when ships loaded with cattle, grain, and farming utensils were coming over in little fleets from Europe to help to settle America. In all likelihood some of these vessels got cast away on the island, for it has ever been a dreadful place for wrecks, and in some way the animals managed to scramble safe ashore, and thus the place became populated.

The wild cattle disappeared early in the century, but the horses, or rather ponies, are still there, and very interesting creatures they are.

Winter and summer they are out on the sand in all weathers. Indeed, they scorn to go under cover even in the wildest storms, and although shelters have been built for them they will not deign to enter them. Another curious thing about them is that they are never seen to lie down, and apparently go to sleep standing.

There are now about four hundred of these ponies, divided into troops, each under the charge and control of an old stallion, whose shaggy, unkempt mane and tail sweep the ground as he stands sentinel over his numerous family.

They belong to the Dominion Government, and it has been usual to cull out some forty or fifty of the best of them each year, and send them up to Halifax, where they command good prices.

They are stanch, sturdy little animals, and very serviceable when properly broken. In my boyhood days I rejoiced in the possession of a fine bay that, barring a provoking habit of pitching an unwary rider over his head, was a great source of enjoyment.

The manner of catching the ponies is for a number of mounted men to surround a band and drive it into a corral in which a tame pony has been placed as a decoy. This is often a very exciting experience; the cracking of whips, shouting of men, neighing of ponies, combine with the plunging of the frightened captives and the gallant charges of the enraged stallions to make up a scene not readily forgotten.

Once safely corralled, the best males are picked out and lassoed, and the rest turned loose to breathe the salt air of freedom once more.

As the breed was observed to be degenerating greatly of late years, means have been taken to improve it, and it is probable that ere long Sable Island ponies will be more desirable than ever.

A very amusing thing in connection with animal life on Sable Island is the story of the rats, cats, and dogs.

First of all were the rats, who are reputed to be very clever about deserting sinking ships, and who here found plenty of opportunity to show their cleverness,

for wrecks are always happening. They thus became so plentiful that they threatened to eat the human inhabitants out of house and home. Indeed they did make them do without bread for three whole months upon one occasion.

This state of things, of course, could not be tolerated. A large number of cats were accordingly imported, and they soon cleared the premises of the rapacious rodents. But it was not long ere the pussies in their turn grew so numerous, wild, and fierce, as to become a source of serious trouble. A small army of dogs was therefore brought upon the scene, and they made short work of the cats, thus rounding out a very curious cycle.

Did space permit I could tell something about the seals, and their very quaint and attractive ways and manners. But perhaps enough has been already written to convince readers that however lonely, barren and insignificant Sable Island may seem, it has an interesting story of its own which is well worth the telling.—*J. Macdonald Oxley, in Youth's Companion.*

### THE VALUE OF SMOKE.

The weight of the great smoke cloud daily hanging over the city of London, England, has been computed by Prof. Roberts at 50 tons of solid carbon and 250 tons of hydrocarbon and carbonic oxide gases for each day of the year, and its value at \$10,000,000 per annum.

### TO PHILLIS, TEN MONTHS OLD.

Baby Phillis, lady fair,  
Fat and small of size,  
With the sun's gold in your hair,  
And the sea's blue in your eyes;  
How I wonder what your will is,  
Winsome Phillis!

When you point with tiny hand  
At your tiny toe,  
How am I to understand  
What you mean by doing so?  
Prithce tell me what your will is,  
Dainty Phillis!

When you, wide-mouthed, on the floor  
Like a birdling sit,—  
Twenty different notes try o'er  
In a pretty talking fit,—  
Guess it, can I, what your will is,  
Saucy Phillis?

When you suddenly, untaught,  
Clap your hands amain,  
Is it that some new sweet thought  
Flashes through your baby-brain?  
Come, unriddle what your will is,  
Merry Phillis!

When you gravely fingering scan  
Tiniest scatterings,  
Studying the atomic plan  
Are you, in those specks of things?  
Who can fathom what your will is,  
Quaintest Phillis?

To the ceiling when you raise  
Finger and rapt face,  
Dear now-come, do you gaze  
Back towards your heavenly place?  
Half I fancy what your will is,  
Happy Phillis!

But when you come crawling after  
Me with eyes ashine,  
And with sudden burst of laughter  
Stretch your small, plump arms to mine,—  
Ah! I know then what your will is,  
Darling Phillis!

—W. TREGO WEBB,

Spectator.

