

# VARIOUS

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# Various

## Birds and Nature Vol.

### 11 No. 4 [April 1902]

## WHAT TIME O' YEAR?

In leafless woods, the purpled wind-flower sways,  
And violets, in penciled lines, or blue,  
Blossom in gentle groups, and, blanced of hue,  
The fern unfolds, by painted orchis sprays.  
The columbine, on hills and sandy braes  
Swings to the bees, that colored pollens strew  
Below its bells, while singing, soared from view,  
The meadow-lark still mounts the heavenward ways.

I know thee, April! thine the azure mist,  
Lifted and lowered, like a lady's veil,  
Before the rims of woodland sunshine kissed;  
And thine the lated twilight's golden sail,  
When slanting lines of fire and amethyst,  
Riot in withered field and sodden swale.

— *Eliza Woodworth.*

# APRIL

“Here is April!” cuckoo cries  
From the tall tree near the skies;  
“April! April!” croaks the frog  
From his dank hole in the bog;  
“April!” sings the thrush again  
From his clay nest in the lane.  
April, ’tis thy merry weather  
Makes the wild colt burst his tether;  
April in his royal dower  
Has soft sunbeam and sharp shower;  
April is the very soul of youth,  
Eye of love, and heart of truth —  
That is April.

— *Walter Thornbury, “The Twelve Brothers.”*

# THE BLACK-CHINNED HUMMINGBIRD (*Trochilus alexandri.*)

*To the ornithologist who may be so fortunate as to visit Southern California in the spring, when Nature has put on her holiday attire, and everything appears at its best, our friends, the feathered midgets, will contribute not a little to the pleasure of his stay.*

*– Benjamin T. Gault.*

The Black-chinned Hummingbird has a long and narrow range extending along the Pacific coast from Southern British Columbia southward into Southern Mexico, where it passes the winter. Eastward its range extends to Western Montana, Western Colorado, New Mexico, and Western Texas. In some portions of this range it is very abundant, while in others that are apparently as well suited to its habits it is rare, or never seen at all.

This Hummingbird, which also bears the name Purple-throated and Alexandre's Hummingbird, is very similar in its habits to our eastern ruby-throat. Even in its call notes and antics while wooing its mate it is almost a counterpart of the eastern species.

Next to the Anna's hummingbird, the Black-chinned is the most conspicuous of all the hummingbirds that frequent southern

California. At twilight it is a frequent visitor to the orange groves, and later, as night approaches, it retires to the mountain sides, where, with numerous individuals of its own kind and other birds, it finds a resting place through the dark hours.

Mr. B. T. Gault has related an interesting anecdote that occurred in his experience with hummingbirds. He once found a nest of the Black-chinned species in which there were eggs nearly ready to hatch. Wishing the nest, which was an exceedingly fine one, he cut the branch only to find the eggs of no value as specimens. Finally, finding a nest in which there were two fresh eggs, he took them and substituted the two older ones. The female bird watched this action from a nearby branch. Returning a few days later, he was surprised to find two little naked worm-like bodies in the nest. Naturally satisfied and pleased over the result of his experiment he says: "The old bird seemed pleased too, as she watched me from a neighboring branch, while arranging her feathers, evidently wondering why I should take such a deep interest in her treasures. And well she might be pleased, for incubation had been robbed of all its tediousness in this case and the pair acting on this assumption undoubtedly hatched another brood, but not in such haste, I venture to say."

The nests are delicate affairs, and in many cases resemble small sponges, readily assuming their normal form if the edges are pressed together. The inner cup is seldom more than one inch in diameter. The walls are usually composed of the down of willows. This is firmly woven by an unsparing use of spider web.

Usually a few small leaves and scales of willow buds are attached to the outer face, evidently to give it stability.

It has been stated that hummingbirds invariably lay but two eggs in each set. The female Black-chinned Hummingbird seems to be at least one of the exceptions that prove the rule. Major Bendire says that “nests of this species now and then contain three eggs, all evidently laid by the same female, and such instances do not appear to be especially rare.”

The Black-chinned Hummingbird is like all the other birds of its kind. Always inquisitive, never afraid to combat a foe and always active, the lines of Jones Very are especially applicable to its character:

Like thoughts that flitted across the mind,  
Leaving no lasting trace behind,  
The humming-bird darts to and fro,  
Comes, vanishes before we know.

# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN ANTELOPE

I cannot tell you the exact date of my birth. As I was separated from my mother at a very early age, this lack of knowledge on my part, I think, should be excused. But Polly has often told me it was the second day of April, 1866, that I came into her possession.

On that particular morning the wind was very high and had a stinging bite in it and my mother, after giving me my breakfast, left me nestled down in a bunch of tall, dry grass, and went out for her own breakfast.

I soon fell asleep. How long I had slept I do not know, when I was suddenly aroused from my comfortable nap by a large, dark animal snorting right over me. Of course, I was very much frightened and wished my mother would come to me. If I had not been so shaky on my legs I would have run away in search of her, but my feet had an uncomfortable way of getting too far apart, and my body seemed entirely too heavy for my legs; so I lay very still, hoping that this strange object might pass on and not disturb me. But a few moments later there bent over me what I soon after learned was a man.

“Hello!” he said, “here is a baby antelope. There – don’t struggle so, or you will break your pipe-stem legs.”

Soon I found that it was useless for me to try to free myself

from his grasp, for while he was not at all rough, he held me quite firmly. Then I began to shiver from fear; also from the cold wind.

“Poor little fellow – he is cold,” the man said, soothingly, and he took a blanket from the pommel of his saddle and wrapped it around me. Then, mounting his horse, with me still in his arms, we set out across the prairie. After about half an hour he stopped at a gate, where there were several log cabins huddled together.

“Polly! Come here, Polly!” the man called, and a little flax-haired girl came running from one of the cabins.

“What is it, papa?” she called, as she opened the heavy gate.

“It is a new pet for you – a baby antelope,” and he handed me down to her.

Polly put me on the ground and lifted the blanket from around me.

“Oh, the funny little darling!” she cried. “Papa, he is all legs and spots, and – and ears.”

“Yes,” the man replied; “he will soon lose his spots, but his legs and ears will stay with him, and it won’t be very long until he will show you how he can use those long legs of his.”

The man rode away, and Polly carried me into the house, where everybody handled and looked at me, all of which made me feel forlorn indeed. But when Polly put me into a box half full of nice, clean hay, in a sunny nook between two of the cabins, I felt that the best thing for me to do was to lie down and go to sleep.

After a comfortable nap I awoke, feeling very hungry, and

began to call feebly for my mother. But it was Polly, henceforth my foster mother and beloved friend, that came in answer to my call. She carried me into the kitchen, where a bottle, with a quill wrapped with a soft rag for a stopper, was standing by the fire. Polly took the bottle and put the stopper into my mouth. The rag was not pleasant to my taste, and the quill, although disguised by many soft wrappings, was hard and unyielding. Naturally, I objected, but Polly persisted, and after a while I got a taste of the warm milk that flowed through the quill. Then I ceased to struggle and proceeded to take my dinner in the only way I knew.

At an early age I was taught to eat cornmeal and wheat bran, both of which I liked very much.

Soon the yard became entirely too small for me. I longed to go outside, where there was room for me to use my legs, and I got to watching for the gate to be opened. Polly noticed my desire to get outside the gate, and one day when I was standing near it, looking out through a crack in the fence, she came and put her arms around my neck.

“Lopez,” and her voice had a note of sadness in it that I had never heard before, “it is because I love you so that I keep you shut up in this yard. A big, wicked panther lives near here, and he might carry you off, just as he did my little lamb. I never told you about it before, because I did not want to make you feel sad, and – and, Lopez, I thought maybe you would feel jealous if you knew how much I had cared for something else.”

I tried to make her understand that I was not in the least

jealous of the dead lamb; also that the fact that a panther lived near the ranch did not alarm me. I longed for freedom – glorious freedom – and felt that there was no animal of the plains that I would not willingly enter the lists against in a foot race.

One bright morning, soon after this, Polly's father opened the gate, at the same time saying to her, "I am going to turn Lopez out for a little while this morning and let him stretch his legs and eat some grass."

"Oh, papa!" she cried; "he will run away, and the panther will catch him."

"Oh, no," her father replied; "he will come back, and you need not fear the panther at this time of day."

Caution is one of the characteristic traits of my family, so I approached the open gate slowly and stood looking out for a few moments. The ranch is situated on the bank of a small stream, which here swings around, forming a deep crescent. Lying within the loop, between the stream and a low range of hills, which just above the house flattens down to a ridge, is a lovely valley, level as a floor, and perhaps a mile and a half in length. At the widest point it is not over three-quarters of a mile wide and narrows down to a point at each end of the crescent. When I saw this beautiful playground my heart leaped with joy, and I sprang away with the fleetness of the wind. When I had tired myself out running around the valley I came back to Polly, who still stood by the open gate.

After this Polly allowed me to go out every morning, and again

late in the afternoon; and a little later I had perfect freedom, going and coming when it pleased me. I never stayed out at night, however, and but seldom went beyond the beautiful valley, which was my playground.

One warm day in midsummer Polly and her father came out to the live-oak tree by the gate, in the dense shade of which I usually took my noon nap. Polly was carrying her little work basket and some bright red ribbon. Her father had a strap of leather and a small bright buckle. I got up at once and went to them, curious to know what they were going to do, besides the scarlet ribbon was very attractive. I soon saw that they were making me a collar. The strap was measured to fit my neck and then covered with the ribbon. Then the buckle was put on and a very large bow of ribbon, which showed off handsomely against the white of my neck and breast, finished the collar.

Soon after I learned the utility of this collar. It was early morning, and I had gone over the ridge and was quietly feeding. Suddenly I raised my head and saw a man, not fifty yards away, with his gun leveled toward me. I looked at him very straight, and he lowered his gun and went away. My bright collar had saved my life.

One bright November day I had gone to the top of the hill and was looking away over that beautiful plain, when Polly came and stood by me, her hand resting gently on my neck. Suddenly the thought came to me that it would be a fine thing for Polly and I to go away and live on the plains. What a free and happy life we

would lead! We probably would find other antelopes, and Polly in time might learn to run as fast as I.

As this idea took shape, I determined to try it at once. So, without giving Polly any warning, I sprang away and ran a short distance, then turned around and invited her to come on. She, thinking that I wanted to romp, came after me; but when she could almost touch me, I ran away as before, and again she came after me, laughing with glee. This maneuver I repeated several times, all the time going further out on the prairie. At last Polly stopped and looked back. Then, to divert her attention, I put forth all my efforts to draw her into a romp. First, by running around her in a circle, and then stopping near her to jump up and down with my legs very stiff. This always amused her greatly, and it succeeded this time. She laughed and ran after me, trying to catch me, but I dodged first one way and then the other, just allowing her fingers to touch me, then slipping away from her, but all the time going further out on the prairie. At last Polly grew tired and stopped to look around her. She gave a little gurgling cry of terror that brought me to her side at once.

“Oh, Lopez!” she cried, “Lopez, I don’t know the way home. It all looks alike, and I have forgotten which way we came.” She clasped her arms around my neck and cried bitterly.

“Oh, Lopez!” she wailed, “don’t you know the way home? You know, animals are smarter about such things than little girls.”

I did know the way perfectly well, and Polly’s grief hurt me so that I was strongly tempted to lead her straight back to the

ranch; but I reasoned that it had cost me considerable effort to get her this far, and why should I now turn back? Besides, to me, there was no reason why Polly should not be perfectly happy in this new and free life, when she should become accustomed to it. And why should she not adapt herself to my mode of life as easily as I had myself to hers?

Reasoning thus, I deliberately started in the opposite direction to the ranch, walking slowly, with Polly by my side.

Thus we wandered on for perhaps an hour, then I stopped to graze, and Polly sank down on the grass to rest. But soon she sprang up, saying: "This won't do, Lopez; we must go on and try to find home. Just see how low the sun is." And then she began to cry.

We had started out early in the afternoon, and the warm sunshine made the air very comfortable. Now the sun hung, a great red ball, just above the dark line that marked the union of sky and plain, and the chill of evening was fast coming on. We wandered on, apparently the only living creatures on this vast plain – on and on, until the last ray of sunlight had been swallowed up by the dusk of evening. The sky was thickly dotted with glittering, twinkling stars, and still we wandered on. A band of white appeared just above the eastern horizon, quickly followed by the moon, which filled the lonely plain with the softened glory of its light, and still we wandered on.

After what seemed to me a very long time, Polly sank down by a bunch of tall grass, and I lay down close by her side. She

slipped her hand through my collar and soon fell asleep. As the night grew colder, Polly nestled closer to me, and as we had a thick bed of dry grass we were tolerably warm.

Polly slept quietly, and now I, too, fell asleep, and was only awakened by the broad light of day.

I got up and went to grazing near where Polly was lying still asleep. Soon I saw a wolf go from the carcass of a dead cow to a pool of water and drink. Being quite thirsty, as soon as the wolf had gone away I went to the pool myself and drank. Then, thinking Polly might be thirsty, too, I went back to her and rubbed my nose against her face to wake her. She sat up and looked around her in a dazed sort of way for a few minutes, then stood up and strained her eyes, first in one direction and then in another. At last she turned to me, and I could see that her lips were quivering.

“Lopez, I think there is water where those small trees are growing; anyway, we will go and see.”

When we reached the pool Polly knelt down and drank, and then gathered and ate several handfuls of red haws from the scrubby little trees that grew around the pool. We then started on, walking as fast as Polly could.

We had gone on for perhaps two hours, when I insisted upon stopping to eat some more grass. Polly pulled at my collar. “Oh, Lopez, come on,” she said, a little crossly. “If I can do without something to eat, surely you can, too.” But I would not go, and she sat down in the grass to wait for me.

When we started on again I noticed that Polly was shivering. The sun had disappeared behind a misty veil of clouds and it was much colder than it had been in the early morning. Later in the day we came to a deep ravine. A few pecan trees grew along its banks, and here Polly gathered some of the fallen nuts and ate them, while I ate my dinner of grass.

We found a place where a smooth trail crossed the gully. This we followed until it broadened out and was lost in the prairie grass.

The sky was now a dull slate color, and little feathery flakes of snow were falling. I could see a dark streak in the distance, which I knew must be timber. Instinct taught me that here we should find shelter, and towards this we were hurrying. Little drifts of snow were gathering in Polly's flaxen hair, and her hands were purple from cold. She stumbled often, sometimes quite falling down, but she would get up and struggle on. The timber still seemed a great way off, when Polly stopped.

"It is no use for me to try, Lopez," she said; "I can't go any further. You will have to go on alone," and she sank down into the snowy grass.

Now, this was a terrible fix to be in. The storm was growing worse every minute, and I knew that it must be almost night. I would run around Polly and stamp my feet, then rub my nose against her face, trying to persuade her to get up and go on, but she would only say, "Poor Lopez, I can't go any further." After awhile she would not notice me; then I knew she was asleep.

A feeling of despair was coming over me, when I saw two men, riding toward the timber. I ran out, so that I was directly in their path, and stood facing them, stamping my feet. It was evident that they were watching me with some interest, and when they were near me the older of the two exclaimed, "Why, that is Polly Vinson's pet antelope. Rope him, Bob, and we will take him home!"

The young man loosened a coil of rope from the pommel of his saddle and began to swing a loop above his head; but before the loop could descend I sprang away and ran to where Polly was lying, now almost covered with snow. The two men started on, and I ran round and round and stamped my feet. I was almost frantic.

They stopped again, and the younger one came to us. He got off his horse and bent over Polly, then turned and called to his companion, who was now coming toward us:

"Mr. Dawson, here is little Polly herself, and I fear she is dead." He lifted Polly up and shook her, rather roughly, I thought. "Polly! Polly!" he cried, "wake up and tell me how you came here."

Polly opened her eyes and sleepily looked at the young man. "Oh, Mr. Bob," she said wearily, "Lopez and I are lost. Won't you please take us home?" Then she leaned her head against him and closed her eyes again.

He quickly pulled off his overcoat and wrapped it around Polly, and handed her up to the older man. Then, tying the end

of his rope through my collar he mounted his horse, when we started swiftly toward the timber. To be tied was an indignity that I had never before submitted to, but now I was so glad to have some help with Polly that I made no resistance.

Very soon we were at the Dawson ranch. Indeed, Polly and I, without knowing it, had been going straight to the ranch, and were not more than a mile away when she gave out and went to sleep in the snow.

When Polly was warm and had eaten something, Mr. Dawson put her to bed, and Mr. Bob took me to the warm kitchen, where I had a nice supper of wheat bran. While I was eating Mr. Dawson came to the kitchen and patted me on the neck. "Brave Lopez," he said, "you saved the life of your little mistress."

After a few minutes the young man stood up. "Mr. Dawson," he said, "I am going to ride to Vinson's to-night and let him know that his child is safe."

"What," cried Mr. Dawson, "ride ten miles through this storm? You must not think of such a thing."

"Yes," replied the young man, quietly, "I shall go. Blackbird will carry me there safely, and I shall only be doing as I would be done by."

A little later I heard him ride away, and then I went to sleep.

*Alice Moss Joyner.*

# THE BURROWING OWL

## *(Speotyto cunicularia hypogaea.)*

The Burrowing Owl is a denizen of the prairies and plains west of the Mississippi and the Missouri rivers. It is found from localities somewhat north of the United States as far to the southward as Guatemala. In some parts of this large area it is exceedingly common, and it is the only representative of the owl tribe that inhabits, in any numbers at least, the treeless regions of the western states.

Unlike other species of owls, the Burrowing Owl is especially fitted for a subterranean mode of life. It will make its home in the burrows of the various animals that inhabit the prairie regions. These birds are social and live in colonies consisting of several pairs. Some Indians have claimed that it retires into its burrow at the approach of winter, and there remains in a torpid condition during the cold weather. Careful observers have, however, shown that this is not the case. It may be said that, except in the northern part of its range, where the winters are severe, it is resident wherever found and not migratory. It is probable that it would not be migratory at all were it not that the animals upon which it feeds are not obtainable in severe weather. Investigation has proved that the stories of the confidential relations existing between the Burrowing Owl, the prairie dog and the rattlesnake are pure

fabrications of an imaginative mind, greatly strengthened by additions as they are passed from person to person. The only foundation for these stories is the fact that this Owl and also the rattlesnake do occasionally enter the burrows of the prairie dog. Dr. Coues has said "that the Owls live at ease in the settlements and on familiar terms with their four-footed neighbors is an undoubted fact; but that they inhabit the same burrows or have any intimate domestic relations is quite another thing. It is no proof that the quadrupeds and the birds live together that they are often seen to scuttle at each other's heels into the same hole when alarmed, for in such a case the two simply seek the nearest shelter independently of each other." It is not at all strange that the snakes should also enter these holes. It may be that they do so for the want of some other retreat on a broad expanse of prairie, but it is much more probable that they are in search of food, either in the form of young dogs or the eggs of the Owl. Though the Burrowing Owls are found with the burrowing mammals, they do not occupy the same holes with them and do without doubt drive them out if they wish to pre-empt the burrows for their own use.

Though the Burrowing Owl probably obtains most of its food in the early twilight, it is frequently "in motion on the brightest days, capturing its prey or evading its pursuer with the greatest ease." Like the sparrowhawk, it frequently hovers in the air and drops upon its prey. Its food consists of the smaller rodents, including the young of the prairie dog, frogs, fish, lizards, snakes

and insects of various kinds. In fact, its food is so varied and consists of noxious animals to so great an extent that it is of great service to the agriculturist. Dr. Fisher says: "In summer and fall, when grasshoppers and crickets are exceedingly abundant on the western plains, the Burrowing Owl feeds almost exclusively on such food. Like the sparrowhawk, this little Owl will chase and devour grasshoppers until its stomach is distended to the utmost." It is rare and only when pressed for food that it attacks and kills other birds.

Dr. C. S. Canfield gives the following account of its nesting habits: "I once took pains to dig out a nest of the Burrowing Owl. I found the burrow was about four feet long and the nest was only about two feet from the surface of the ground. The nest was made in a cavity of the ground, of about a foot in diameter, well filled with dry, soft horse-dung, bits of an old blanket and the fur of a coyote that I had killed a few days before. One of the parent birds was on the nest, and I captured it. It had no intention of leaving the nest, even when entirely uncovered with shovel and exposed to the open air. It fought bravely with beak and claws. I found seven young ones, perhaps eight or ten days old, well covered with down, but without any feathers. The whole nest, as well as the birds, swarmed with fleas. It was the filthiest nest I ever saw. There are few birds that carry more rubbish into the nest than the Burrowing Owls, and even the vultures are not more filthy." In this nest Dr. Canfield found scraps of dead animals, both of mammals, snakes and insects.

Major Bendire believes that when these Owls are once mated they are paired for life. He also likens their love-note, which is heard about sundown, to the call of the English cuckoo. He says that it is “a mellow, sonorous and far-reaching ‘coo-c-oo,’ the last syllables somewhat drawn out, and this concert is kept up for an hour or more. These notes are only uttered when the bird is at rest, sitting on the little hillock surrounding the burrow. While flying about a chattering sort of note is used and when alarmed a short shrill ‘tzip-tzip.’ When wounded and enraged it utters a shrill scream and snaps its mandibles rapidly together, making a sort of rattling noise, throws itself on its back, ruffles its feathers and strikes out vigorously with its talons, and with which it can inflict quite a severe wound.”

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