

Notes on "General" - The Cal. Condor

37 prints

General was hatched on March 22, 1906 in a cave in one of the mountain ranges of Southern California. We found the nest and Condor's egg on March 10th and waited patiently for the new arrival. The shell house in which General was living was of no mean value for it could have been exchanged readily for a hundred dollar bill. But the shell contained something of more value than money, even if it was the small son of a scavenger. The morning after the advent of General I found but ~~a~~ the end of the house left, the rest had likely served as a meal or had been removed from the nest.

Some birds have been known to eat the larvae from which they emerge.

The California ^{Condor} is ~~our~~ ^{the} largest bird that flies. The range of the bird is limited ~~to the~~ almost entirely to the Coast range of California. There are only about half the number of eggs of this bird in the various museums of the world that there are eggs of the Great Auk which is now extinct. The California Condor is a bird nearing extinction and if no protection were giving ^{en} it the bird would become extinct as ~~po~~ population advances.

~~These were some of the reasons~~

These were some of the reasons and because no one else had ever made a close study of the life of a young condor we determined to do it. We made the trip to California for the purpose of finding the nest and we stayed four months to study the bird in its home, until it could grow to the time when it was able to stand the trip from southern California to Portland and then to the New York Zoological Park.

1 * On July 10, ^{the young condor} ~~we~~ arrived in Portland ^{very well} with the young condor. He stood the trip from Southern California, and for the time being was given quarters in the back yard. He then weighed fifteen pounds. He was fed about twice a day with a pound of raw meat and was given plenty of water. About once a day, he was given the freedom of the back yard; then he would spread his wings and flap for exercise or take ^{go} several jumps ^{ing} across the yard, using his wings to help him along.

One day when the dog was lying asleep in the yard, the bird walked up and nabbed him by the ear. The dog retired with a yelp. At every opportunity, he would pounce upon the dog with a flap of his wings, but the dog would never remain to fight. One afternoon ^{he} climbed the back steps where the cat was sitting. Pussy didn't see the condor till he reached the top step and was about to take a bite, when she suddenly awoke with a fit and jumped backward into space.

2 * In order to study the young condor under favorable conditions and to watch him closely day by day, we took him to our summer camp up the Willamette River. We placed "General" (as we were accustomed to call him,) in an enclosure about twelve by fifteen (by fifteen) feet that we made under the trees. We gave him the stump of an old tree to perch on, but he did not like the idea of being closed in.

3 *
4 plain

yes condor food & change to captivity.

4 *

By the middle of August, General was well fledged, except that his breast was still covered with gray down. His wing feathers were strong, but they were not yet able to support his heavy body. We let him out part of each day so he could get plenty of exercise, take his bath and warm himself in the sun. If he were not released once a day, he became restless and soon attracted our attention by climbing up and poking his nose through at the gate. The minute I opened it, he would stalk out but always stopped a moment or two at the gate to look about. He did nothing without deliberation. Then with several hops, he would go half way across the yard, flapping his big wings. He would go through a regular dance as if celebrating his freedom. He ^{stretched} flapped his wings and jumped straight up in the air several times in succession, as if he were an Indian on the war-path, but he never said a word.

5 *

The old condors had shown great love for each other and for their single nestling. The young condor soon lost his wildness when taken from his native haunt and he was now gentle and fond of those who cared for him. We had fed him by hand on small bits of raw meat, from the beginning, and he showed an intelligence that was as marked as in any pet we have ever had. He loved to be petted and fondled. He liked to nibble at my hand, run his nose up my sleeve and bite the buttons on my coat, and he was gentler than any pet cat or dog. Every move he made was with care as if afraid of being too rough. Of course if he were scared or struck at, he would strike back. But there was never the least indication of savageness when he was well treated. If I held meat in my hand, he would nibble

to get it, but never once did he bite.

So to 6*
7*
8*

One would think that there could be little attachment for a vulture, but there is nothing treacherous or savage in the condor nature. Contrary to expectation, he was cleanly in his habits. He had been fed on clean, fresh meat since he was taken from the nest, and before long he would take nothing else. Several times we tried him on stale meat, but he would never take it unless compelled to by hunger. His preference was undoubtedly clean, fresh beef. If it dropped on the ground or was the least bit dirty, he refused it. Several times we tried him on wild game, such as squirrel and rabbit, but he would not touch it if he could get fresh beef. One time I gave him nothing but wild game for two days, and when I got some beef, he made a regular glutton of himself. The instant I went near with the beef, he smelled it and began reaching for my hand. He gulped down two or three pieces and then I slipped in a piece of squirrel, but he ^{threw} spit it out. I tried mixing the two, but he picked out all the beef, and when he accidentally got a taste of squirrel, he shook ^{with a shake of his head, he sent it flying} his head and threw it out. He was very fond of a good bone, which I often nailed to his perch. He would gnaw it with as much eagerness as a dog, till there was not a bit of meat left.

9 *

General had an aversion to the camera. Ordinarily I could walk up to him any place about the yard, but whenever I approached with the camera, he began to edge off and get away as far as possible. Very likely he remembered the instrument from his babyhood when we hauled him out of his nest and when he hissed in defiance at being posed before the camera. He was in a savage state then and fought like a demon. It was evident that he still retained a hatred of his younger days.

10 *

He was always shy when visitors were about, unless he could climb up on one of his perches out of reach. Ordinarily he would play about the yard, paying no attention to our presence, but the minute he saw a stranger coming, he made all haste to climb one of the perches. He was very much afraid of women, which we thought was due to the manner of dress or to the brighter colors that were worn. He knew the three members of the family in their camp clothes, and a change in dress always made some change in his attitude.

(2) (10)

11 *

We set up a perch for General out on the river bank just beyond our camp, and there he loved to sit in the sunshine. He seemed to enjoy watching the buzzards that occasionally sailed around overhead and the crows that flapped past. The birds that flew about overhead were always intensely interested in him. The buzzards sailed around and around, turning their heads to watch, but ^{seem} could never ^{to} understand why he stayed there. The crows were always greatly alarmed and often perched nearby to caw in curiosity, while he sat as if in reverie, watching every move they made.

①

At times General was as playful as a pup. In the morning after I gave him his breakfast, he would jump down from the perch in his enclosure and pounce upon a stick or a leaf, shake it in his bill and drop it to jump upon it with both feet and toss it up again. The minute I let him out, he became hilarious and went hopping about as if he could hardly control himself. He was extremely fond of pulling on a rope.

Ref 12 *

He often played with him this way. He would hang on simply up and down
He generally made straight for the tent to grasp one of the ropes and set back with a pull that threatened to demolish the whole thing. He often amused himself in this way for some time, and he looked very comical in such antics. When I pulled a rope along the ground, he watched it like a kitten after a string and ambled along to catch it. When he got tired of romping, he would always come up to get his head rubbed and roll about on the ground. He was exceedingly fond of shoe-strings or anything else that he could pull. *After* If *the zone* *was* sitting in the sun, he would lie flat on the ground, letting his wings fall loose, and nose about in perfect content.

flapping + pulling with considerable strength

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14 *
S.P.

His intelligence was surprising at times. He soon learned to follow me about and come when called. If I walked over to the apple stump and patted it, he climbed up immediately. His instinct to climb was strong, for the minute I set a ladder up against the tree, up he would hop. He liked to climb to the top of the stump and fly off. One of these was ten feet high. He was just learning the use of his wings and seemed to enjoy the new sensation. He would fly to the ground only to climb up ~~again~~ and try the same experiment. again. At times he

15 *

flapped his big wings with such energy that he lifted himself into the air and could hardly keep from going; but this was only his practice, for he was still timid about trusting his wings.

15
Portrait *

General undoubtedly felt a strong love for our society. He wanted to be petted and amused, and he preferred to be near me rather than be alone. He always followed me about, not running at my heels to be sure, but coming more deliberately at a short distance. He would take a few sidling hops, with a flap of his wings, pause a moment and then proceed a little further.

16 *

Whenever I took the axe and went across ^{the creek} to split some wood, he was always eager to follow. When he saw me chopping sticks and throwing them in a pile, he showed great interest. He would hop along till he was standing by my side and would jump upon one of the blocks and sit there till I finished. If I were sawing wood, he wanted to get right on top of the saw as if to help. When I returned to camp, he might climb to one of his perches for a little while, but he soon got tired of being alone and came ambling back where we were.

Portrait 17 *

Early in the morning when it was cool, General sat with his neck drawn in and his big ruff up around his head almost to his eyes. You could see nothing but his eyes and nose protruding from the bunch of loose feathers. He often sat for a long time as if in a sullen mood when he was not let out to

play, and at such times he ate comparatively little or no food. When he was hungry, he would eat till his craw bulged out against his chest like a baseball. I generally gauged his appetite by feeling of his shirt-front, for when it was loose and flabby, I knew he was looking for something to eat.

General was fond of bathing. He would go down to the creek and patter along in the water for an hour at a time. He was especially attracted by any small, white object, such a light-colored rock, a piece of broken china or a little piece of paper. He liked to play about the hydraulic ram. When he decided to bathe, he would get under the spouting water and wallow in the pool. He never seemed to get enough, or at least to feel thoroughly washed, for when he was soaked through, he would step out for a moment and then suddenly decide to go back again. He would keep this up till he could hardly walk or until I drove him out of the water. He was very much afraid of bathing in the river at first, but later became more used to it.

Bz
78 *

Lost

As I have said before, one might think that there could be little to love in a vulture. He is the incarnation of ugliness to most people. He is generally known only as a degenerate and a carrion-eater, but there is more than this behind the condor nature. He readily adapts himself to better conditions. In the young condor we raised, the instinct for cleanliness was strong. He wanted good, fresh meat and he loved the clean, running water of the creek. The old condors at home in the mountains showed what seemed to be a deeper love and affection than I have ever seen in bird life. To us this impulse in the young bird was marked as he grew. In the absence of his own kind, he took human companionship not passively, but he showed it pleased him. He never seemed ugly to me. Why should such a creature be revolting? It was not the outward appearance but the inner nature of the bird that we learned to know. He was not stupid. He saw everything. He had a temper and showed anger when there was cause. But he was always ready to be petted. The minute I came near, he wanted to nip the buttons of my coat, nibble at my watch-chain or have his head rubbed. Behind his rough exterior and his appearance of savageness, this young condor showed a nature that was full of love and gentleness.

22 *

23 head rub
love *

End

2 *

After a continued and close study of over six months, the young condor had now grown almost to maturity, and we had carried our observations as far as the conditions would allow. He weighed twenty and a half pounds and had a wing-spread of eight feet and was forty-six inches in length.

1906,
On September 29, General left Portland, Oregon, to take up more commodious quarters at the New York Zoological Park.

*He is there now and
When you visit New York, I'm sure he would
like to have you call,*