

to release birds with razor blades.

McClure's professional involvement with birds as vectors of pathological diseases often provides food for thought. For example, in referring to the Great Horned Owl (p. 52) he writes "... these large owls have been demonstrated to have antibodies for rabies, or to be carriers for the live virus, and the toe nails that might have contacted a diseased animal can be infectious.". In view of the endemic status of rabies in southern Africa, ringers who handle large owls or other mammalian-eating birds of prey should bear such risks in mind and take appropriate precautions against laceration by the beak or talons.

I consider this to be a book that any keen birdringer/bander will benefit from having on hand. At U.S.\$15 it is very reasonably priced and good value for money by today's standards.

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A BIRD LIST FOR INSOMNIACS

I used to feel inferior when in company of those comparing lists, all on a global scale, into three figures in length and I had none. Not any more, with the immortal Gilbert and Sullivan I sing 'I've got a little list' a very little one, easily portable in a tiny mind. The list contains no birds known to me in reality that bring sleep-murdering scientific facts. Selection for inclusion has been rigorous with long trials and many errors, and the rejection list is long. For example, Thick-heads and Thick-knees were discarded - too reminiscent of medical symptoms (reminders of past or future ailments are not sleep-inducing). The Cut-throat Finch was crossed off very soon, only two murmured repetitions of that name has one not only wide-awake but frightened to death as well. Willett was tried many times before rejection. Will it? Won't it? Indecision, and wrestling with permutations of what it would if it could, were too aggravating. Poor-me-one was nice, pathetic and wistful, until I found myself muttering Pour-me-one. All of these and many more had to go, they were not soporific.

Always I return to the few, the known and tried. The Spectacled Spiderhunter, searching shortsightedly through the jungle in my mind. I contemplate its long development through the ages specialising through time as a hunter of, and feeder on, spiders, becoming more and more myopic until now the poor creature has spectacles. I am sympathetic - to take a spider and leave the sticky web needs practice, and spectacles. The mind's eye wanders lower and finds a Logrunner at the end of a log - a very long log. He's waiting for the starting gun, he's away, he's getting smaller, and smaller, and smaller - he's gone. I wander away. I come out of the jungle and someone accosts me: "Seen any birds?" and oh! the delicious satisfaction of the reply, "Only a Paltry Flycatcher". The jungle is not the only habitat of possibilities. Try open savannah, and watch the Cuckoo-rollers. I see it turn them over and over, down a long incline. Sometimes it just carefully rolls them flat, wafer thin. The most fascinating of them all is in this habitat: the Buffalo Weaver. The possible methods of these birds are truly the stuff dreams are made of. Do they start with two trees, one Buffalo distance apart, and weave a horizontal line, horns, spine through to tail tip, anchored on the other tree, and then make some kind of drop stitch work for legs? Perhaps they begin with the feet and build upwards? I can't visualise a complete Buffalo being the work of one female or even one male and one female. It must be a co-operative effort with production limited to one Buffalo per annum. Personally I do not care for the build upwards method, I prefer the drop down from horizontal, but if anyone had an alternative pattern I should be very happy to hear from them.

Jungle and savannah have trees but I always end by looking beyond the tree line to the edges of the Arctic Circle to find Steller's Eider - the insomniacs' bird par excellence. Murmur Steller and the mind is filled with a glittering starry firmament, magnificent to dream up and so to sleep beneath the warmth of your eiderdown.

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