

# VARIOUS

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## Содержание

VOICES	5
THE AFRICAN LION	9
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	10

# Various Birds and all Nature, Vol. IV, No. 6, December 1898

## VOICES

W. E. WATT

ALL animals with lungs have some sort of contrivance in the windpipe that is able to set the air in vibration as it is expelled or inhaled. Some have not only this means of making vocal sound, but have also power to vary the quality and intensity of it. Out of this second ability come speech and song.

Ants converse with their antennæ, having no lungs nor windpipe. Bees do the same. Those of her attendants who first perceive the absence of the queen from the hive apply their antennæ to the feelers of their companions. The ensuing excitement settles the question as to their ability to talk. This shows that while voice is the usual organ of language there is yet a good deal of conversation going on about us that is not expressed in words, just as there is much music performed by insect orchestras with no vocal contributions.

Hares and Rabbits never use their voices except when suffering intensely. When caught by an enemy or wounded in the chase they utter the only cry that ever escapes from their throats. Spasmodic agitation of the chest muscles and the larynx gives forth the sound. Such unintentional utterances are frequent in other animals that use their voices freely when nothing has injured them, as the death shrieks of cattle and the screams of horses attacked by wolves.

It is of little use to ask why animals are equipped with voices, for the fact is an animal could hardly be constructed with lungs and apparatus for controlling ingress and egress of air without the controlling organ's being more or less noisy or even musical. Snorts, snores, whistles, purrs, groans, and trumpeting follow naturally where the bellows and pipe are active.

Although Darwin considers that the habit of uttering musical sounds was first acquired for courtship, and that in man it was early associated only with his strongest emotions, such as love, rivalry, and triumph, the writer holds the opinion that both significant and musical utterance originated not in any desire to move others, but was cultivated solely for the pleasure it gave the one who made it.

If primitive man did not receive language ready-made at creation, but developed it as the philologists claim, it was a gradual acquisition. While our early ancestor dug in the ground he emitted certain sounds, as he pursued he uttered others, and as he devoured he indulged in a different grunt or exclamation. When he wished to call the attention of others to one of these acts he merely reproduced the sound that went naturally with it. And so *clamor concomitans* became *clamor significans*. But the sound as it came forth at first had no meaning and no design. The man made the sound rather instinctively than mentally and he enjoyed making sounds as much as a baby now enjoys crowing or a youngster delights in yelling when he has no ideas he cares to convey. Much of the singing of birds is done merely because the birds wish to please themselves with the sounds peculiar to themselves. They are, as a rule, in no-wise trying to charm their mates, and they are not at all desirous of pleasing anyone but themselves. It would be as reasonable to claim that the carpenter on the roof is whistling to please his sweetheart or that the lumberman alone with his cattle in the forest trolls forth his jolly song for any amorous reason. There are times when these purposes are the cause of singing, but the fact is that the great majority of the singing and whistling done by men, birds, and beasts sounds far

better to the ones that produce it than to any other. In fact, society itself would be in a far better state if the men and women who sing would only acknowledge that they are doing so mainly to please themselves, and they might then be persuaded in part to leave off trying to surprise their hearers at times by singing louder or higher or faster than nature intended they should do. Most people enjoy listening to song, but no one can appreciate the beauties of it so well as the artistic singer who has acquired his talents by assiduous and intelligent discipline. His enjoyment of his own efforts is as much higher than that of his auditors as is the pleasure of the man who sings out of tune above the felicity of his hearers.

Elephants speak in three ways. Pleasure is evinced by blowing the proboscis in a sharp manner – like the sound of a trumpeter learning. Wants are murmured over in the mouth. Rage roars tremendously low in the throat. While these sounds are not made for the purpose of informing others of states of feeling, yet they do convey to man and beast an idea of what is going on. So the lower animals accidentally, if you please, have a sort of language. It is instinctive and conveys no intelligence not immediately connected with the present state of the speaker or his community.

Marcgrave says he has frequently seen the meetings held by the Ouarine Monkeys and enjoyed their deliberations. "Every day they assemble in the woods to receive instructions. One takes the highest place on the tree and makes a signal with his hand for the rest to sit round. As soon as he sees them placed he begins his discourse in a loud and precipitate voice; the rest preserve a profound silence. When he has done he makes a sign with his hand for the rest to reply. At that instant they raise their voices together, until by another signal silence is enjoined."

Professor Garner has studied simian speech so carefully that he is able to converse with Monkeys to a limited extent. He says they have words for "food" and "drink," have a spoken salutation, and can distinguish numbers up to about three, and have some notion of music. "In brief, they appear to have at least the raw material out of which are made the most exalted attributes of man."

Aristotle noticed that voices vary with conditions when he gravely announced that the Calf affords the only instance in nature where the voice of the young is deeper and graver than that of its parent. Wild animals frequently change their voices on domestication. Domestic Dogs and even tame Jackals have learned to bark, which is a noise not proper to any species of the genus, with the possible exception of the *Canis latrans* of North America. Columbus discovered that Dogs left by him on an island where there was no game nor any other occasion for barking lost their voices completely before he visited them on a subsequent voyage. Some breeds of domestic Pigeons coo in a new and quite peculiar manner not manifested in their wild state.

The same species of birds living in different localities sometimes have different vocal habits. An excellent observer says an Irish covey of Partridges spring without uttering a call, while, on the opposite coast, the Scotch covey accompany their springing with intense shrieks. Bechstein says that from many years of experience he is certain that in the Nightingale a tendency to sing in the middle of the night or in the day runs in families and is strictly inherited.

As the Parrot acquires human language by association with unfeathered bipeds, so do many voices modify themselves as circumstances alter, and the particular sound which one day may accompany and express fright or anger may be laid aside for another more suitable to new conditions, much as a man uses different sounds in asking for butter at a French restaurant and in a German inn. And while it is probably not true that speech was given for the purposes of communicating with others, it has occurred in nature that speech has become the principal means of transmitting ideas.

An old Goose had her nest in the kitchen of a farmer. She had been endeavoring for a fortnight to hatch some eggs, but was taken ill rather suddenly and found she could not finish the task. With evident agony she repaired to an outhouse where was a Goose of but one year's growth. In some way she told the young sister that her valuable mission was about to be interrupted ere its fulfillment and implored her to become her successor. So complete was the communication between them that the young one entered the kitchen and took her place, with evident maternal pride, remaining there till

the eggs were hatched and afterwards caring assiduously for the welfare of the Goslings. The old Goose expired contentedly before incubation was complete.

A gentleman who visited London occasionally was usually accompanied by a small Dog. Nearing the city, he put up at an inn and left the Terrier there to await his return. Once, as he came back from London, the Dog was not there. He had had a fight with a large Housedog and been so badly wounded that it was thought he would not recover. But after lying quietly for a couple of days he disappeared. About a week later he returned with a larger animal, sought his adversary, and by union of efforts gave him a terrible punishment. It was found that his coadjutor was a neighbor, and that the wounded animal must have traveled long to visit his friend, had been able to tell him of his sorrows, awaken his sympathies, and keep him enlisted in his cause all the while they were on their way to seek their enemy, and was no doubt able to congratulate his partner many times during the homeward journey on the success of their valorous enterprise.

Professor Morgan says: "I find that the sounds emitted by young Chicks are decidedly instinctive – that is to say, they are inherited modes of giving expression to certain emotional states. And some of them are fairly differentiated. At least six may be distinguished: First, the gentle, piping sound expressive of contentment – for example, when one takes the little bird in one's hand. A further low note, a sort of double sound, seems to be associated with extreme pleasure, as when one strokes the Chick's back. Very characteristic and distinct is the danger note. This is heard on the second or third day. If a large Humble-bee, or a black Beetle, or a big lump of sugar, or in fact anything largish and strange, be thrown to them this danger note is at once heard. Then there is the piping sound, expressive apparently of wanting something. It generally ceases when one goes near them and throws some grain, or even only stands near them. My Chicks were accustomed to my presence in the room, and generally were restless, and continuously made this sound when I left them. Then there is the sharp squeak when one seizes a Chick against its inclination. Lastly there is the shrill cry of distress, when, for example, one of them is separated from the rest. I have very little doubt that all of these sounds have a suggestive value of emotional import for the other Chicks. Certainly the danger-note at once places others on the alert, and the pleasure-note will cause others to come to the spot where the little bird is when the note is sounded."

A good story is told by H. B. Medlicott to show what ideas wild pigs can express in sounds. "In the early dawn of a gray morning I was geologizing along the base of the Muhair hills in South Behar, when all of a sudden there was a stampede of many Pigs from the fringe of a jungle, with porcine shrieks of *sauve-qui-peut* significance. After a short run in the open they took to the jungle again, and in a few minutes there was another uproar, but different in sound and in action; there was a rush, presumably of the fighting members, to the spot where the row began, and after some seconds a large Leopard sprang from the midst of the scuffle. In a few bounds he was in the open, and stood looking back, licking his chops. The Pigs did not break cover, but continued on their way. They were returning to their lair after a night's feeding in the plain, several families having combined for mutual protection; while the beasts of prey were evidently waiting for the occasion. I was alone, and though armed, I did not care to beat up the ground to see if in either case a kill had been effected. The numerous herd covered a considerable space, and the scrub was thick. The prompt concerted action must in each case have been started by a special cry. I imagine that the first assailant was a Tiger, and the case was at once known to be hopeless, the cry prompting instant flight, while in the second case the cry was for defense. It can scarcely be doubted that in the first case each adult Pig had a vision of a Tiger, and the second of a Leopard or some minor foe."

The structure of throats that talk and sing varies greatly, and scientists have yet much to learn about the adaptations of forms to purposes. Agassiz gives the following clear description of the throats of birds: "The proper larynx is very simple, destitute of vocal chords, and incapable of producing sounds; but at the lower end of the windpipe there is a second or inferior larynx, which is very complicated in structure. It is a kind of bony drum, having within it two glottises, formed at the top of

the two branches of the windpipe, each provided with two vocal chords. The different pieces of this apparatus are moved by peculiar muscles, the number of which varies in different families. In birds which have a very monotonous cry, such as the Gulls, the Herons, the Cuckoos, and the Mergansers, there is but one or two pairs; Parrots have three; and birds of song have five." But there are still further items regarding special uses that make the question hard to solve.

Some throats that have apparently the same structure as far as the scalpel and microscope can distinguish have marvelously different powers of delivery. MacGillivray has pointed out that the Rook and the Hooded Crow seem to have just as complex an apparatus for their sepulchral utterances as the Nightingale and the Blackbird. But where loudness of sound is required without regard to range and quality there are some notable conformations, as in the Whooping Crane and the Howling Monkey. This Monkey has large cavities communicating with the glottis, and the air reverberates as it passes the larynx so the most deafening noises are produced.

Birds sing and other animals yell, roar, and snort, not for love-making purposes, but rather because of the joy of life that is in these creatures, and it manifests itself in this way as well as in the gambols of the Lambkin or the antics of the Monkey. The voice of the Mule is the sweetest sound in the world – to some other Mule. But it is sweeter still to the Mule that makes the joyful sound. Placzeck notes that a bird frequently sings lustily when he knows himself to be entirely alone. "In the spring-time of love, when all life is invigorated, and the effort to win a mate by ardent wooing is crowned with the joy of triumph, the song reaches its highest perfection. But the male bird also sings to entertain his mate during the arduous nest-building and hatching, to cheer the young and, if he be a domesticated bird, to give pleasure to his lord and the Providence that takes care of him, and in doing so to please himself. Lastly, the bird sings – by habit, as we call it – because the tendency is innate in the organs of song to exercise themselves." In other words, animals have the apparatus for making noises provided them in their organs of breathing, and because they have them they use them and are delighted with them, each in his own kind. Finding them a source of joy unto themselves it is not to be wondered at that they employ their voices in their love-making because they feel that what pleases themselves so much must not be without effect upon their loved ones.

## THE AFRICAN LION

Amid the far-off hills,  
With eye of fire, and shaggy mane upreared,  
The sleeping Lion in his den sprang up;  
Listened awhile – then laid his monstrous mouth  
Close to the floor, and breathed hot roarings out  
In fierce reply.

– *Edwin Atherstone. (1821)*

THE common opinion of the Lion from the remotest times is that he is King of Beasts, and a single glance at his face of majesty is sufficient to make us accept it. His roar is terrific, and the fact is well known that all animals tremble at the mere sound of his voice. The effect of it on his subjects is said to be indescribable. "The howling Hyena is stricken dumb, though not for long; the Leopard ceases to grunt; the Monkeys utter a loud, gurgling sound and mount to the highest tree-tops; the Antelopes rush through the bushes in a mad flight; a bleating flock becomes silent; the laden Camel trembles and listens no longer to his driver's appeal, but throws load and rider off and seeks salvation in flight; the Horse rears, snorts, and rushes back; the Dog, unused to the chase, creeps up to his master with a wail." But it is said we must not think that the Lion lets his roar re-echo through the wilderness at all times. His usual sounds are a deep growl and a long-drawn tone, like the mewing of a giant Cat. His real roar is uttered comparatively seldom, and many people who have visited countries inhabited by Lions have never heard it. It is the only one of its kind, and is surpassed in fullness of tone by the voice of no living creature except the male Hippopotamus, according to Pechnel-Loesche. "The Arabs have a pertinent expression for it: '*raad*,' meaning thunder. It seems to come from the very depth of the chest and to strain it to the utmost."

This Lion is distributed all over Central and Southern Africa. They are regularly met with on the banks of the Blue and White Nile, and in the deserts of central and Southern Africa they are of common occurrence.

The Lion leads a solitary life, living with his mate only during the breeding season. Selous says that in South Africa one more frequently meets four or five Lions together than single specimens, and troops of ten or twelve are not extraordinary. His experience taught him that the South African Lion prefers feasting off the game some hunter has killed to exerting himself to capture his own prey. This is why he regularly follows nomadic tribes wherever they go; he regards them as his tributary subjects and the taxes he levies on them are indeed of the heaviest kind.

The Cubs are usually two or three and the Lioness treats them with great tenderness. They play together like Kittens. In well-managed zoological gardens Lions are now bred as carefully as Dogs; and even in circuses, where the animals have but little room and often insufficient nourishment, they are born and sometimes grow up. The cubs are at first rather clumsy. They are born with their eyes open and are about half the size of a Cat. Towards the close of the first year they are about the size of a strong Dog. In the third year the mane begins to appear on the male, but full growth and distinction of sex, according to Brehm, are only completed in the sixth or seventh year. Lions in captivity have lived to be seventy years old.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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