

Some Humours of Bird Life

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A rather remarkable thing has occurred at Devonport. During the April floods a large Pacific Gull (*Gabianus pacificus*) visited a friend's garden, stayed some time, then moved his quarters to Fleetwood Smith's property, not far away, and has been there ever since with the exception of one night, when he was scared by the headlights of a car, and flew away. He was thought to have gone for good, but was back again next morning, and has become a permanent boarder, and a very entertaining one.

Mrs. Smith gets on well with animals, and has quite a number of pets. When she gets a hen's egg and folds it in her dress, calling "Corbie! Corbie!", the Gull sidles up, and goes through a strange performance. First, he elevates his head and beak until they point to the heavens, and utters a series of resonant calls; then he ducks his head between his legs, and calls again from that peculiar position; finally, the head and beak assume the horizontal, when the concert concludes with a sort of "gobble," as if in imitation of a turkey-rooster. Mrs. Smith then offers the uncooked egg, which is crushed in the powerful beak and swallowed, shell and all. "Corbie" then assumes the *Oliver Twist* attitude of "asking for more"; he grabs his mistress's fingers and pulls her dress in persistent endeavour to obtain more of the coveted luxury.

One of the fowls on the same property became obsessed by the idea of making her nest on a horizontal branch of cypress, a considerable height above ground. Mrs. Smith heard a strange noise one morning and went out, but "Corbie" was already busy devouring the egg which had been laid aloft and had tumbled to the ground. Mr. Smith then placed a large bag across the branches for the "aero-plane hen" as she was christened, and this daring bird actually brought out five chicks on the aerial platform. The first one hatched fell off, and was found by Mrs. Smith on the ground, quite uninjured. Had "Corbie" discovered the chick as quickly as he did the egg, the chances are that it would have disappeared down that capacious throat.

The Gull is a magnificent fellow, in full plumage, with snow-white head and under-surface, black back and wings, yellow legs and feet. The formidable beak is orange, with reddish tip. This plumage is not fully developed until the fourth year, the feathers of the immature birds being brown and grey of various shades. It is remarkable that this large wild bird, in perfect health, should have chosen to settle in civilised quarters, but "Corbie" evidently knows when he is on a good thing.