



BADGERS AT SETT

From a flashlight photograph by Arthur Brook, a leader among nature photographers of yesterday and to-day

NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY AND ITS PIONEERS

Some Influences and Developments of Twenty Years

By RALPH CHISLETT

The illustrations accompanying this article are from entries in the "Field" Empire Photographic Competition, run in connection with the British Sporting Exhibition

IN connection with an exhibition of sporting interest, and for reasons of space, I must confine myself to the work of those whose subjects are taken in a wild state, which necessitate sporting methods of approach because of their timidity and mobility, although the term "nature photography" truly has a wider application. The work done by Wilson and Pitt on fishes and other marine and shore life, which has been a major development of nature photography in recent years, may be cited as an example. Upon cinema work I will not comment except in so far as the following remarks can be applied to work of both kinds.

When that prodigious event, the Great War, crashed into our lives, the pursuit of wild life with a camera was already at a high point of development. The lines for its advancement were duly settled. Anastigmats, the reflex camera, the focal-plane shutter, and the tele-lens of fixed focal length were almost as they are to-day. The use of the camouflaged hiding-place was understood. Flash-powder was already used for work at night. Lodge and the Keartons, Shiras, Dugmore and Chapman, Moore and Miss Turner, King and Kirk, Fortune and Heatherley, Pike and Brook had pointed the way; and others were amplifying their methods with keenness. Then came the War, to cut across all our activities; and very soon, Knight filled in hours of waiting, in trees in no-man's-land, risking snipers to bag orioles with his camera.

Since those days methods have altered little. Those with sharp eyesight and quick fingers still peer into the hoods of reflex cameras. Apparatus has become smaller, but is little if any more efficient. Twenty years ago, the half-plate camera, fitted with a swing-back that enabled foregrounds to be brought into focus, was in general use for work from hiding-places. Its comparative disuse to-day is not a gain. Plates may now be faster, lenses with wider apertures may pass more light, flash-powder may have been improved, but the best



A PIONEER OF BIG-GAME PHOTOGRAPHY

Mr. A. Radcliff Dugmore in British East Africa, in 1909, with his reflex camera specially designed for telephoto and other long focus work. It can be held high up for focussing, and it was with this camera that the famous charging rhinoceros photograph was taken

later work of the pioneers is still the equal of the best work of to-day.

Later developments have concerned subject-matter more than method, and have been mainly the result of the influence of individuals with an interest in particular directions, or with special facilities, local or otherwise.

The crags of mid-Wales, and their scattered avian populations have provided difficulties for Arthur Brook which he has never tired of circumventing, not always for his own benefit. To call at Bwlth, to be shown the nesting-sites of raven, buzzard and peregrine, to be put into hides and left with cameras, have been thrilling events in the early careers of many young naturalists. Although, in some years, he has journeyed far, Brook provides an excellent example of the success of the policy of persevering with the material of one's own locality, especially when it is good.

The post-war nature photographers had to aim high. Already they found that most of the British birds and mammals had been well illustrated. The day had gone when Atkinson could remember the authorship and quality of every photograph of European birds. Searches were made for such species as were thought (not always correctly) to have been passed over by the pioneers; by scrutiny of the pages of *Wild Life*, by inquiries from older men, knowledge of the degree of success which had been achieved with rare and difficult species was obtained. We endeavoured to fill in the blanks. Species which appeared to have been featured but little were tracked down to be observed and photographed serially as completely as possible, "from A to Z" as the phrase ran.

Fowler and others, optimistically but systematically, set out to complete the photographic surveys of the birds which breed in Britain which they had already begun. Others specialised on a group of species, or on the birds of some area or type of

country, as Thomson and Higham in Norfolk; or even for some years became hypnotised by a single species. Before long normality was reversed; and it became more easy for a publisher to obtain first-class photographs of rare birds, and such as breed in almost inaccessible situations, than to get portraits of the commoner kinds. Instance the heron, that spectacular bird of the high treetops. Many have sat on planks wedged between high branches, underneath hides of sacking suspended from twigs, to watch a heron disgorge fish and feed its young. To such a hide Wagstaff climbed repeatedly to pass the night, and be in readiness for events at daybreak, during several seasons.

Under the influence of the late G. A. Booth and O. J. Wilkinson, was developed the desire and the craft to give a high pictorial quality to photographs of birds and beasts. These two workers brought such to a fine art. They were independent alike of the spectacular in subject-matter, and of the special interest of rare species. A plain little meadow-pipit, a chaffinch, or a gull, through their lenses became the centre of interest of as perfect a composition as the lines and tones of the accessories would allow them to achieve. "Would the site compose well" they asked before they set to work.

They have many followers to-day, in whose work their influence may be unconscious, but is none the less apparent. For the appreciation of such work, as for its production, tasteful discernment is needed. Not a note must be false; attitude must be easy and natural, contrast must be sufficient without hardness, tone apparent in whites and blacks, with a slight emphasis on the bird or beast. Much of the more spectacular work so frequently reproduced has entailed far less skill and ability.

The two weekly journals like *Country Life* and the *Field*, which reproduce our work so well, have had much influence in supplying a demand for good pictures of unusual and interesting kinds.

Under the guidance for more than half the time of Jasper Atkinson, the Zoological Photographic Club has continued to provide a means for the exchange of ideas, of obtaining expert criticism of our work, of seeing the best original work of our fellows. The club has spread a far influence for good sportsmanship; for straight, truthful work without any stressing; of difficulties; and for care that our native wild life shall not suffer from the over-keenness of photographers.

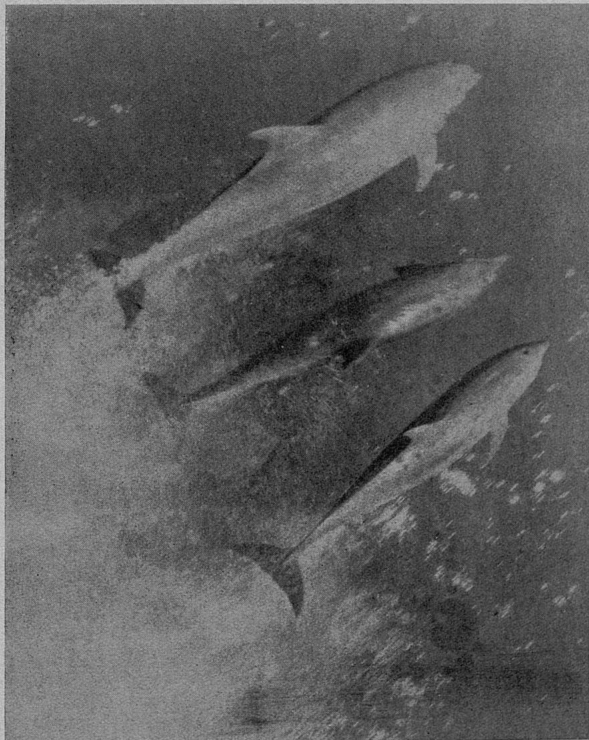


FLASHLIGHT PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AT 11.30 P.M. OF A BARN OWL WITH A RAT IN ITS BEAK
By Eric J. Hosking

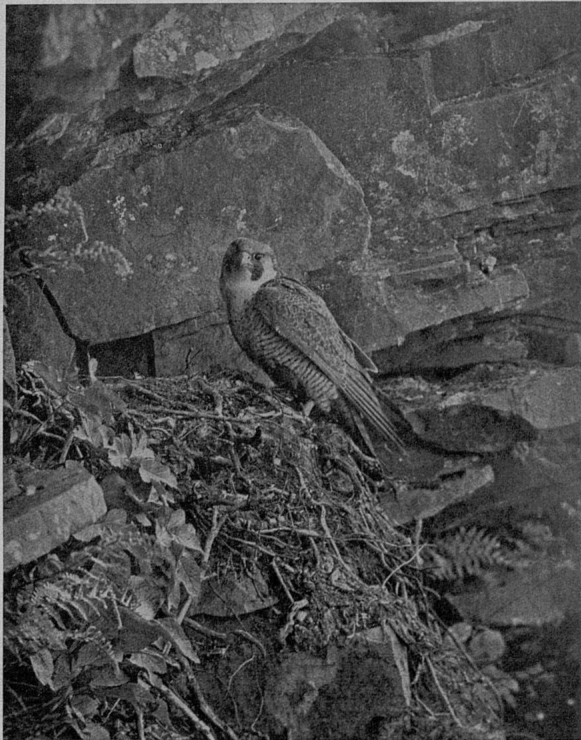
A place where much of the best work of the year can be seen together has been provided by the Natural History Section of the Royal Photographic Society's Exhibition. Work has come to Russell Square from far afield, particularly from distant parts of the British Empire, from the U.S.A., Sweden, Holland, Germany and Japan. Naturally the influence of the R.P.S. has been in the direction of sound technique; but zoological interest also

has always been considered. It has been very useful to be able to compare recent foreign work with our own.

Much work has been done in the U.S.A., where Shiras, Chapman, Job and others led the way along lines similar to those followed in Britain. The Dutch were early in the field; and their fascinating reserves of Texel and the Naadermere have been explored by many of our own workers.



PORPOISES LEAPING IN FRONT OF A SHIP
By C. N. Thornton



PEREGRINE FALCON AT EYRIE
By Arthur Brook

The Swedes, too, as befitted the countrymen of Linnaeus, have produced much of excellence, especially the work of Bergt Berg which stands out in any company.

Germany followed a little later, but Horst Siewert provided some of the most striking prints to be seen at the *Country Life* Exhibition, held in the winter before last. Like some Englishmen, he has developed a hide, fixed to the tops of poles let into the ground for treestop work; and his osprey pictures amplified the work of Knight on the same species. Some of our own younger men are using the same method with success.

The invention of the "Sashalite" flash-bulb has given an added impetus to nocturnal work and to photography in dark places. Hosking has developed the technique of photographing nocturnal birds, his pictures of barn owls bringing rats and mice for their young being a major success of 1936. An attempt to repeat the performance with the tawny owl in 1937 led to the loss of an eye caught in the owl's talons; but he has not been daunted.

Thompson, the evergreen Brook, and others, turned their attentions to the badger. In eerie darkness, with flash and shutter synchronised, they wait for sight or sound of "broek." Suddenly the surrounding boles, the entrance to the earth, the badger's striped head, are brightly illuminated. The scene is just registered on brain and plate, then all is darkness again. Many late nights and long waits are required to secure a series of such pictures.

J. A. Speed developed a special camera made to his own requirements, and a very powerful flash, some years ago; which enabled him to give high-speed exposures in any light. Many will remember a stoat on its hind legs nuzzling suspended bait; and the same animal leaping among branches. So fast is his shutter and so powerful his flash, that by an ingenious arrangement in his camera, he exposed two plates with a single flash, one a fraction of a second behind the other, thus securing two different attitudes. The scamper of a vole, a bee in flight, were others of his captures.

Dugmore had already flashed African lions before the War, before cars had invaded the bushy veldt. A car nowadays itself is used as a hide, and wild animals take so little notice of it that cubs have crawled under a car, and the driver has not dared to move, lest he injure them and provoke the lioness. In the vast nature reserves of America, stories are told of bears fed from cars until they have learned to expect food from parcels, and of owners who have returned from walks to find their car door smashed open, the luncheon basket rifled, and a problem set for them by the sight of the bear curled up on the back seat.

In South Wales, Salmon and Ingram have photographed wild ducks feeding on the surface of meres, and waders walking the margins. Waiting, hidden in a boat moored among reeds, is cold work in winter; but the method has yielded many interesting natural scenes previously only seen through binoculars. Birds can be so caught which are on the British list as winter visitors only. Its site hidden at a place likely to be visited by such birds, frequently in huge flocks, often with odd rarities among them, is a fascinating way of passing an autumnal day. But field-glass and telescope are used more often than camera.

Flight has always fascinated photographers. The successful work of the earlier years was mainly with large species—gannets and gulls—about their breeding grounds. Birds alighting at their nests, displaying their wings in braking attitudes, or leaving, like the hen harrier recently captured by Miss Pitt, have made many graceful pictures.

Deliberately to note the usual lines of passage of birds, to place hides to command that line in which the photographer waits hopefully for the chance which may or may not arrive, but which must be seized immediately or missed, is a newer development. In such work a chance missed may never return; and for success it is desirable that more than a medium of luck be mixed with carefully-used skill. W. E. Higham's pictures of Montagu's harrier are among the best results of such efforts.

Colour photography is in process of development. No doubt it will come. The oyster-catcher's red bill was photographed by the autochrome process many years ago. With the later processes the necessity to give exact exposures for correct colour rendition (correct in parts at least) results in positives which show the same colour rendered very differently in the sunlit and the shadow portions of a picture. For natural history work, monochrome is preferable to colour rendered untruly.

Those who have used a camera for many years to portray wild birdlife tend more and more to place field ornithology first in their interests; and it is desirable that they should. The preference

brings compensations for many photographic disappointments. Without such interest in wild birds for their own sake the more difficult photographic tasks would never be attempted. The long journeys to distant parts of these islands, to remote country places abroad, would never be made.

Ornithological interests ever widen. The veteran Knight, breeziest of naturalist photographers, extended his intensive studies of raptorial birds to

POLO PREPARATIONS FOR 1939

A Long View for the Westchester Cup

THE next series of matches for the Westchester Cup is due to be played in 1939 at Meadowbrook and, whatever criticism may have been levelled in the past at the Hurlingham Club Polo Committee on the score of unpreparedness, on this occasion there should be no grounds for complaint.

A selection committee, of course, is fair game for criticism; that is human nature, and no doubt many of us will be quite convinced in our own minds that we could have done the job much better ourselves when the time comes, but we may rest assured that the preliminary *bandobust* is being made with a commendable thoroughness. Already the nucleus of a string of ponies has been acquired to mount our team, and the Hurlingham Club Polo Committee (or rather to call it by its new name, the Hurlingham Polo Association Council) have bought out of the fund seventeen ponies. Of these, four are English, six are Argentines, and seven Australian ponies are due to arrive in this country in March.

These have been selected apparently with some fairly clear notion of whom our side is likely to be composed, for they are all heavy-weight ponies, averaging about 15.2 hands. The Argentine ponies have been chosen by Major N. W. Leaf, who went out to Argentina some time ago with that purpose in view, and I believe they are all absolutely top-class performers, though at the moment no detailed description is possible. One had a notion that after the Argentine team's successful trip to America in 1936 and the subsequent sale, the cream of the ponies bred in those parts had been acquired in America, and certainly in 1937 the quality of the ponies brought over for the American championship by the Argentine team was not equal to that of their predecessors. I am, however, assured now that those who have been bought for Hurlingham are of the very highest quality and are genuine international ponies.

Of the Walers I have no information, but we know that nowadays they breed a stamp of pony very different from the type to which we were accustomed in the old days. To most of us the term "Waler" (which to an Australian means nothing) suggests an animal not bearing outward marks of aristocratic descent: in fact a rather ugly, angular, narrow-chested, goose-rumped beast who, despite his proved merits, was not usually of the stuff of which international polo ponies are made. Partly on account of the popularity of pony-racing in Australia, and partly through other causes, there is now a plentiful supply of just the stamp of small thoroughbred that is suitable to modern polo.

We saw a few samples last season when the Goulburn team had such a successful trip and there are plenty more at home like them—or better. Mr. R. Skene, who has at least a very good chance of selection as No. 1 in our side, should in that event be well suited out of this draft.

It will be recalled that his pony Maitland fetched the big sum of £1,700 at the sale of the Goulburn ponies at the end of last season and, even admitting that that price was perhaps excessive even for so good a pony, it is probable that among those due to arrive here in March there will be some of at least equal merit.

The problem of mounting an international team is fraught with difficulty, for in this case, most emphatically, one man's meat is another's poison. In this first selection there is no doubt that each pony, apart from its personal merits, has been chosen with the view of suiting one or other of the probable team. That is a job almost incredibly difficult, but those who have been deputed to buy mounts are eminently equipped to carry out even so hard a duty. To begin with the ponies will be stable at Osmaston, where they will be under the

charge of Major Vere Foster, and presumably once the season is begun those who are regarded as "probables" for our Westchester Cup team will have every opportunity to get to know them. By the time our team leaves for America they will probably have about 40 ponies all told, of which it is intended 24 will be the property of Hurlingham.

As the matches are to be played in America we cannot expect so many ponies to be lent by various public-spirited people as would be the case if the series was to be played in England, but none the less there is certain to be a good number. If Rao Raja Hanut Singh is again selected (personally I should like to see him in the side as No. 2, for he is a goal-getter, if ever there was one), he would presumably mount himself.

Other members of the team will certainly have at least one or two ponies of their own worth their place, and we have every reason to hope that our team will be as well mounted as the Americans.

In the last matches in 1936, apart from perhaps two outstanding ponies, our team was in my opinion as well mounted as their opponents. It is the fashion to say that the Americans "of course" have all the best ponies in the world. Possibly the fact that prices fetched there seem to us fantastic accounts for this view. Probably there are more absolutely first-class ponies over there than there are in this country, but we certainly can mount at least one team as well as they can.

As for the players, I think we must admit that they have at present in any case a slight advantage, but wonders can be achieved by enthusiastic teamwork and I, for one, refuse to be depressed.

The fund accumulated since 1930 has now swelled to the substantial sum of £12,000, and this has by no means been exhausted by these recent purchases for no "fancy" prices have been paid. In addition, since the cost of sending a team comes out at somewhere about £35,000, a sum of £20,000, it is hoped, will be guaranteed by polo enthusiasts, as has been done before. Incidentally, it may be remarked that the guarantors have never so far been asked to foot the bill. For one thing, the sale of the Hurlingham ponies will certainly produce a substantial amount after the matches and, for another, in 1930 the share of the "gate" paid over to Hurlingham amounted to appreciably over £10,000.

So far the selectors have not been appointed, but they will be announced in March when preparations for the London season will be beginning. During next season we shall see, so far as is known, all those who are likely to be considered for the team, but there is every prospect of some really fine polo.

Mr. Tyrell-Martin will be coming over with Mr. C. Wrightsman's Texas Rangers, and should any promising player come to light in the Indian tournaments which are about to begin, every endeavour will be made to give him a season at home. In this respect, however, I do not think we can expect great things, apart from the known players who are at present in India, for polo in those parts is not at a very high level at the present time. Possibly the almost general mechanisation of our cavalry is having an effect—certainly it soon will in any case—and it is, I think, agreed that the product of Indian polo is unlikely to acquire the necessary qualities of an international player in England or America without a couple of seasons in one or the other of the two countries. Certainly, in any case, very few Indian reputations have been enhanced by an English season of recent years. Incidentally, this Indian season should be extraordinarily interesting, for several players who are more than likely to gain their places are playing in the tournaments, including Mr. Gerald Balding, Mr. R. Skene and, I believe, Captain H. P. Guinness.

It is heartening to know that every effort is being made to bring about a *renaissance* of our international polo.

JEMADAR.