NOTES

PECULIAR ACTIONS OF A STRIPED GROUND SQUIRREL

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Glimpses of the inner nature of wild creatures are encountered by observers at the most unexpected times and places, and such an experience fell to the writer's good fortune early last June.

Some fifteen miles northwest of Denver, Colorado, is a small

lake leased by a number of Denver men for duck shooting. The so-called "club house" is a frame structure of one room, which serves the manifold purpose of kitchen, sleeping room, store room, etc. It is occupied but one night during the week for only a few weeks in the spring and fall and is overrun with house mice. The shooting season closed April 15th, and the house was not again occupied until the night of June 3d. On this evening the writer, with a companion, reached the cabin some time after dark, and preparations were made to retire.

In the corner of the cabin was a pile of three folding spring

cots, and on top of these was a camp mattress. The cots and mattress were taken out of doors and set up (for we were outdoor sleepers) and the writer promptly turned in. I had no sooner become quiet than I heard a chorus of tiny squeaks coming from inside the mattress, and an examination revealed a warm nest in the padding containing eight tiny, naked, blind creatures whose eyes were not yet opened. Supposing them to be young mice they were ruthlessly disposed of, as mice usually are, and I prepared to resume my slumbers.

I was aroused a few minutes later by my friend (who had not yet retired) calling me softly to hurry into the cabin, and once there a sight met my eyes that I will long remember.

Under where the cots had been piled was a knothole in the floor; this, however was not directly under the position of the nest, which was rather toward one side of the mattress but more to the other side of the space which had been covered by the cots and both were well toward one end of the latter. Emerging from this hole was the mother of the little ones we had just assassinated, but instead of a mouse, it proved to be a large, handsome Pale Striped Ground Squirrel (*Citellus tridecemlineatus pallidus*). As this species is, to the best of my knowledge, strictly diurnal, and the time was between 10 and 11 P. M., it seems very probable that the animal had been frightened from the nest by our entrance and was now returning.

Upon reaching the floor she seemed greatly confused, but after some hesitation she ran to the place from which she had probably been in the habit of climbing up the frames of the cots to the nest. Here she stood upon her hind legs and frantically pawed the air, apparently trying to locate the missing frames. Then she ran back to the hole and repeated the entire performance. She would stand straight up on her hind legs, as straight as a man could stand, and after turning round and round, would fall backward, only to jump up and run about in various sized circles in a vain endeavor to locate her missing family. This performance was continued without a pause for fully fifteen minutes, during which time her excitement and confusion visibly increased, and although we were both within arm's length of her and spoke frequently in an undertone, she did not pay the slightest attention to us. Several times she jumped high in the air from a standing position and falling

to clutch the accustomed frame would fall backward, after which she would spin around repeatedly much after the fashion of a wounded creature. She did this always from practically the same spot. During the latter part of the performance she continually gave utterance to low cries and moans, and her entire manner gave the plainest evidence of grief and excitement. In all my experience with wild creatures, I have never witnessed a more keenly pathetic scene.

Finally, after we had satisfied ourselves that further observations would reveal nothing new, we decided to capture her and photograph her the following morning (it was by this time almost midnight), and here we received a great surprise, for, although she eluded our hands and in doing so exhibited wonderful strength for so small an animal, she did so in a half-hearted manner, and although the knothole was within a few feet, she did not attempt to escape by that means except once, and even then she was back going through her queer performance within a minute.

Previous experience with these little creatures had taught me a wholesome respect for their sharp teeth, so we approached her with heavy gloves, but even when we held her tightly in our hands she exhibited neither fear or anger, and instead of biting fiercely as is usual with this species, she simply nibbled feebly at the gloved finger much as a house cat might scratch at a door it wanted opened.

After capturing the animal three times and allowing her to escape each time for fear of injuring her in her struggles, she was finally placed in a box and we retired for the night. The next morning we made a narrow box with glass sides and no bottom and prepared to make a series of studies. She was somewhat wilder in the sunlight and became quite panic stricken when first put into the glass box, the glass sides being altogether beyond her comprehension; but after a few minutes she quieted down and a highly interesting series of photographs was the result, one of which published herewith shows the erect position above described.

After half a dozen exposures had been made the captive was liberated and promptly scampered into the nearest burrow, and since that time we seldom visited the "club" during the long summer and fall without being greeted by her sharp, clear

whistle, though she took particular pains to keep far away from our inquisitive fingers.

COMMENTS ON MR. ROCKWELL'S OBSERVATIONS

By EDWARD R. WARREN

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The preceding notes were written by Mr. Rockwell at my request after he had told me about the occurrence in conversation, as it seemed so interesting as to be worthy of record.

The animal seems to have been unable to realize that the cots, which had not only supported the mattress in which the nest was, but also covered the hole in the floor by which she had entered the room, were missing. One would think she would have noticed their absence at once, as heretofore they had been there when she went to and fro. It is possible that being a diurnal animal, her confusion may have been due to being disturbed in the night, and that she was even unable to see well by such light as my friend may have had there, though this last would not account for her actions. It is an interesting speculation as to whether she would have acted as she did if it had been daylight.