

IN FULL PLUMAGE: An adult rockhopper penguin, showing the characteristic crest

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the birds are able to lay their clutch and rear a family under such conditions is really remarkable.

So much seems to be happening in a busy colony that it is hard to watch individuals. I was struck, however, by the activities of one industrious little fellow who was making repeated arduous trips to a patch of a rock plant and returning to his mate on a particularly sloppy nesting site with a small contribution of herbage in his beak. The contribution was gravely offered and as gravely received, then added to the general mess beneath! A wheelbarrowful would have been required to elevate the sitting hen out of the slime; but no young husband returning to his bride with furniture for the happy home could have been prouder than the carrier of the tiny wisps of greenery. One could almost see him sneer at the other mud-dwellers who made no efforts to beautify their homes.

#### Traffic Rules

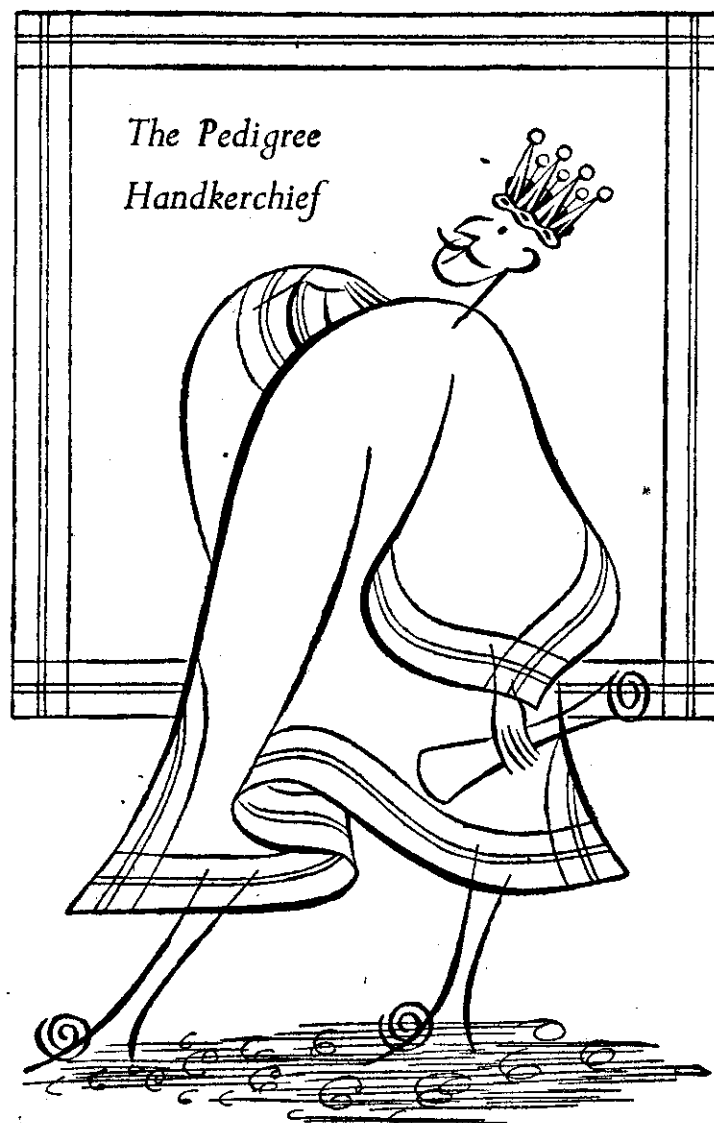
The mated pairs of these little penguins are very devoted and bitterly resent the intrusion of another bird within the immediate vicinity of their nest. The intruder is set upon with vigour and, as any attempt at retaliation only brings him within range of other families, a hasty retreat has to be made. Often in such retreat he runs foul of others, is knocked down, or slips over a ledge before he manages to gain a respite in an unoccupied area. From the latter he must run the gauntlet again. So long as he has a definite objective things are not so bad, for the main runways are so constructed that birds using them can scurry along with the minimum of harassing attention. Well-used runways are channelled deeper and one almost expects to see a penguin on point duty at the intersections.

On the outskirts of the colonies are the outcasts, bad boys and unoccupied unmated birds. These are a source of much indignant annoyance to the nesting birds going about their lawful business. The "gangs" seem to act in unison and as if at a pre-arranged signal, all will race madly along for fifty yards or so, bustling the more sober members of the community and even knocking them off their nests. Suddenly they all stop, only to turn round and race back again. If you can imagine a penguin racing by hopping then you will realise how comical the performance is.

I saw many birds return from the sea. A heavy surf was breaking on the steep boulder beach and on the crest of the wave (or rather in it) would be several penguins. As the wave receded, the rockhoppers would hurriedly pick themselves up and strive to gain drier land. Using beak, feet and flippers they would climb to the top of the boulder in order to get the start required for a series of hops. If, however, another wave threatened to overtake them before they were out of reach, they immediately faced it and dived to meet it. Finally they would emerge a little higher than before.

In April, the breeding season finishes and the time of annual moult arrives. Younger birds moult earlier and some comical, woebegone sights are seen straggling round the colony. In all states of dress and undress they stand about and shiver, lose weight and look ill. Finally the moult is over and, resplendent in a new plumage, the rockhoppers go to sea for the winter. The next four months is spent somewhere out in the southern oceans and not a bird is seen near land.

The populous and noisy colonies which once contained thousands of birds are now deserted and silent. They will remain so until the following spring when, in October, penguin-housekeeping will begin once more.




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