

WADING WITH WATERWINGS†

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Then there is always that one clown in every crowd who has to be different.

Most birds are satisfied just to fly around in the air. But here is one who insists on flying under water as well. And tiring of that he will take a stroll on the river bed. This unusual bird is not a voting member of the waterfowl fraternity, but is actually a thrush with a thirst.

This scuba-swimmer with the aquatic complex bears the preposterous title of water ouzel—pronounced ooze!—a name as bizarre as the bird. Had he qualified as a waterfowl, he would dive and swim with webbed feet. But since he was programmed without webs or fins, he uses his wings as underwater oars—bona fide water wings!

This fantastic fowl not only swims with his wings, but also can blow his ballast tanks and walk around on the bottom of the stream; he will then turn the rocks over with his beak and toes to feed on the various water creatures that are dispersed.

It would seem that the hydraulic habits of this avian submarine may have affected his equilibrium. For he continually bobs up and down with a nervous twitch which has earned him the nickname of dipper, or teeter-bird.

But those oddities are outdone in his choice of a nest. For it is made of living moss and located beside or *behind* a waterfall through which he must fly to

reach his front door. The spray from the cascade keeps the moss alive, and it continues to grow and strengthen its attachment to the rock. Thus that menacing force of the falls is the very function which accents the security of his mansion of moss.

Could this capricious bird be assigned to some colossal quirk of Mother Nature? And just who is this “Mother Nature?” How glibly is God’s creative reality bypassed for some nebulous entity who presumes to have all the power of God, but who can only create (?) a wee degree at a time. With such fame and acclaim attributed to her, wouldn’t you think she could induce at least a few full-grown characteristics? Or at best, leave behind a few bits of evidence to show how they improved from one millennium to the next.

What a ridiculous picture to imagine our dipper-bird trying to gradually learn through the ages how to swim without webbed feet. Did each successive generation just dive deeper? Remember learned behavior is not inherited! What an engineering feat would be required to compute the angle and pitch of the wing to accommodate the change from the medium of the air to the resistance of water—a transition which would have to be made almost instantaneously when he dived. And those air sacs that give birds buoyancy—if he blows his tanks to submerge, how does he breathe? How many eons of sputtering and sneezing would be required before the delicate balance of buoyancy and breathing was perfected!

Absurd? Surely; but no more facetious or unreal than some of the theories to explain away the obvious evidence of creation. For all of those functions would have to be perfectly developed before our skinny-dipper could even discover there were bugs on the bottom of the river or incorporate them into his diet. How expressly is worldly philosophy confounded, even by a bizarre bird.



Figure 1. The water ouzel.



Figure 2. The water ouzel at its nest.

†An account, similar to this, is given, under the same title, in Mr. Keithley’s book, *Portraits on Nature’s Palette*, pages 175-177. The book is available from Mr. Keithley at the address given.

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