

## Bird Fools and Boobies

W. L. McATEE

**I**T THROWS NO LITTLE LIGHT on the predatory tendencies of man that he freely applies the term "fool" to creatures so tame as to allow him to approach and kill them. That they are sometimes so fatally unsuspecting appears to be the underlying reason why most of the birds listed in the following table have been dubbed foolish. It is worthy of note that 18 of the 22 species are, or have been, game birds, and that two of them (marked †) are now extinct.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Bird</i>	<i>Known distribution of the name</i>
Fool bird	Black-crowned night-heron*	S. C.
"    "	Yellow-crowned night-heron*	S. C.
"    "	Labrador duck †	Labr.
"    "	Dusky grouse	Nev.
"    "	Heath-hen †	Pa.
"    "	American coot	Iowa
Fool coot	"    "	Iowa
Fool duck	Redhead	Utah
"    "	Ruddy duck	Me., Mass., N. Y., N. J., Mich., Ind., Ala., Mont.
"    "	White-winged scoter	Ohio
"    "	American coot	Iowa
Fool fowl	American bittern	Ga.
Fool gull	Laughing gull (the young)	N. C.

\* In these cases, ease of approach by day may be increased by the natural ineptness of nocturnal species in full light.

Fool hen	Fulmar	Calif.
" "	Dusky grouse	Man., S. Dak., Mont., Colo., Idaho, Utah, Nev.
" "	Spruce grouse	Generally
" "	Franklin's grouse	Mont., Idaho, B. C., Wash., Ore.
" "	Ruffed grouse	Older records: Eas- tern Canada, New England. Later records: S. Dak., Utah
" "	Willow ptarmigan	Yukon
" "	Sage grouse	N. Dak., S. Dak., Sask., Calif.
" "	American coot	Ala., Ill., B. C.
Fool mallard	Gadwall	Ohio
Fool partridge	Spruce grouse	N. S.
" "	Mearns's quail	Tex.
Fool plover	Dowitcher	R. I.
Foolish coot	Ruddy duck	Conn.
Foolish curlew	Hudsonian curlew (the young)	Mass.
Foolish godwit	Hudsonian godwit	Man.

Special reasons may account for application of the sobriquet "fool bird" to the yellow-billed cuckoo (S. C.) and ovenbird (N. C.); and are known to prevail in two additional instances. The rhinocornia, because it will allow a boat to run over it; and Mearns's quail has attracted contemptuous monickers because it lies so close as to allow itself almost to be stepped on. These are: crazy quail (Tex.), fool hen (Tex., Ariz.), and fool quail (Tex., N. Mex., Ariz.). Crazy grouse for the spruce grouse (Sask.) probably denote unwarranted tameness in the presence of man; and galoot, crazy galoot, and silly galoot for Ross's goose (Athabaska, Alta.) are frankly said to mean that this species is easy to shoot. Birds of the year of the black-bellied plover have been called gump in Massachusetts from their being easy for hunters to approach.

“Booby” is the common name of several species of large sea birds, five of which are on the North American list. This word and its counterparts in a variety of languages were originally applied to the birds by sailors because of their “stupidity in alighting upon ships and allowing themselves to be easily taken by. . . hand.” (Alfred Newton, *Dictionary of birds*, 1896). Other birds that have received the unflattering recognition of over-confidence in man, implicit in the term “booby”, include the scaup ducks (Tex.); ruddy duck (R. I., N. Y., Va., N. C., Wis., Ark., Tex.; also booby coot, N. Y.); the scoters (Pa., Md., D. C., N. C.,—varied to booby ducks, booley ducks, and Sound boobies in the last State); and the king eider (Pa.).

Certain owls are called “boobies”, perhaps in reference to their lethargy by day, facilitating approach by man. These terms are: booby (great horned and barred owls, Md.); and booby owl (barn Del., W.Va.; great horned owl, Pa., Md., Ill.; barred owl, Md.; and burrowing owl, Calif.).

“Gooney” or “gony” (with the word, bird, often added) is a name equivalent to “booby”, that is applied by sailors in the Pacific to the albatrosses, three species of which occur in our waters from California to Alaska.

“Dummy,” in popular speech, has about the same implication as “booby”; it is a name for scaup ducks (Ont.), the bufflehead (Ill.), and as dummy duck, for the ruddy (Mich.).

Other bird appellations meaning “not all there”, so far as coping with man is concerned, are: goofy (Calif.) and looby (N. Y.) for the ruddy duck; pudding-head (black brant, Wash.); and simpleton (dunlin, Mass.). Silly bird for the limpkin (Fla.), however, probably refers to its frenetic, wailing cries.