Frogfish, Which Gobbles Wild Fowl Like Flies, Invades Barnegat Bay

Great School of Singular Monsters, Which Eat Game and Also Fish, and Which Are Seldom Seen in These Waters, Has Caused Excitement Among Fishermen.

Nature's Anglers, They Creep Under Victims, Open Huge Mouths and Gulp Them Down—Then They Lie in Sun with Heads on Shore and Are Often Stranded.

WHEN "Watts" Penn, one of the tallest, stoutest, most energetic of net fishermen, brought in a report with his catch of weakfish to Forked River, N. J., the other day that a big school of headfish, as he called them, had entered Barnegat Bay and were devouring everything in sight, I naturally stood at attention.

"Why," said he, "they go right into the nets, fill up with bushels of fish, then go right out again, the nets forming no more barrier to them than to a caseknife. I wouldn't know what had happened to my nets if several of them had not got tangled up in the broken twine by the tails. Say, when I killed these chaps and cut them open their big stomachs were full of fish, ducks and other small 'fowl.'"

That sounded like such a big new fish story that, unbelieving and skeptical, I determined to call the bluff and put one over on "Watts."

"Oh, well," said he, "don't take my word for it. There are hundreds of them stranded on Sea Dog Shoals and around the shallow waters of Sedge, Clam and other islands. Go over and open a few of 'em and just see what's inside."

Early next morning I loaded camera equipment and heavy fishing tackle in my rowboat and pulled seven miles across Barnegat Bay to Sea Dog, where thousands of snipe and plover resort. "Giant" fish sounded good to me for posing before the camera, whether they made good on the eats or not. Arriving at Sea Dog, I saw a big fish high and dry on the shoal, and made a landing close by. At first I was puzzled by the monster. There he lay, dead as a doornail. With tape measure I noted that he was five feet long, his belly two feet across and one foot high, tapering to the tail. With a stick I opened his mouth and found it extended about the full width of his stomach. His jaws had two rows of sharp teeth, slanting inward, and showing that any prey he seized could never get out alive.

This was no "headfish," I knew, for while many species of headfish grow to monstrous size, such as the well known sea sunfish, they have comparatively small mouths. A little racking of memory and I got it. This was the terrible "angler" fish, called by many local names, such as "frogfish," "all-mouth," "goosefish," "fishing frog," "sea devil," etc. Later I looked up its scientific name, which, as first established by Pennant, is Lophius piscatorius, belonging to an order established primarily by Cuvier as Pediculati.

After taking his picture, I had a look inside him and found the remains of a bushel of fish there. "Watts" had scored one on me. One dead frogfish was enough and curiously drove me to a search for live ones. Surely, I thought, some live ones must be floundering around in shallow water. The think more than justified itself. During three days I found them everywhere, live ones along shore, heads on banks, floundering in shallows at low tides, and dead ones everywhere, all, like the chameleon, colored according to the environment of the moment.

Pushing the skiff off the bar and pulling around into Horsefoot Slough, which separates it from Sedge Island, I saw something floundering in shallow water. At 100 feet distant I thought it was an alligator. That is the impression a live frogfish gives to one at a little distance. The head partly projected above water, the arc-like curve of the big mouth and the bulging eyes would convince any layman, if he ventured no nearer, that salt water alligators must exist.

I rowed right up to him where the camera could rake him at its shortest focus of 5½ feet. Snaps first I decided and some fun later. I was curious to know why he was struggling in shallow water. Surely, I thought, if he wants to get out in deep water he would not head for shore so persistently. The fish explained readily enough. With a few more energetic efforts, he pushed his mouth up on the beach, flattened out the rest of his body in the shallow water behind it and settled down for a sun bath with every indication of content.

In this attitude I got his first picture.

THE STRANDED FROGFISH WAS 5 FEET LONG, 2 FEET ACROSS AND 1 FOOT THICK. HIS MOUTH WAS AS WIDE AS HIS BELLY.

"THERE, PERSISTENTLY PUSHING INSHORE, WAS A GREAT FROGFISH, WITH A HALF-SWALLOWED DUCK PROTRUDING FROM HIS JAWS."

As he had posed so obligingly I had no heart to harm or molest him further. In fact, I happened to look up and see bigger, more important game making for the shore. There, not fifty feet distant, was persistently pushing inshore a giant frogfish, with a duck protruding from his jaws. Hastily beaching the boat, and not thinking to remove shoes or other apparel, I waded out to meet him, camera set for a snap. We met at the proper focus and the portrait resulted. All of this fellow was under water except his protruding, well filled jaws, yet by rare good fortune every outline of his body showed in the picture, even including the squirming method of swimming on or near the surface of the water, with horizontal strokes of the tail, giving snakelike, sinuous curves, the like of which may account for many tales of "sea serpents."

As I backed up, or inshore, I called out "Two," meaning that our friend, "Watts" Penn, had scored on me again, and that all those skeptical villagers and scoffing guests at the resort hotels should be made to eat crow and not bandy "Watts's" stories about as samples of Forked River fish yarns. This fish and his contents I determined to have permanently as exhibit A, marked for identification. Taking kedge and cable from the skiff, I put the former in his jaws and hauled him high up on Sedge Island. There, buried deep under damp seaweed, I have him secured as a lasting exhibition. He will in time be skeletonized, with the shelldrake and many other skeletons within him to show as proof. I'm sorry, I regret to say, my friend did not like to be high and dry. Yet his tenacity of life is shown in the fact that it was twenty-four hours before he gasped his last. He proved to be the largest I handled. He measured something more than six feet in length, and I judged his weight at about 250 pounds. His color was dark red, while the color of the other one basking in the sun near by was gray, like the living seaweed growing about his body and tail under water.

Poling around the shallows of Horsefoot Slough, I found the bottom and beaches everywhere dotted with dead "anglers," which had paid the penalty of venturing too far inland to bask in the sun. Delighted with the day's work, I pulled back to Forked River.

On the Sunday previous I had made a fine catch of blackfish, running two to three pounds each, at the inlet, where stone heaps jut out from the Barnegat Lighthouse, 165 feet high, and where the water deepens abruptly along half a mile of bayshore line.

Next day after the angler fish adventures I rowed nine miles over to the lighthouse for more blackfish. There were no bites at the inlet, and, after several hours' trying, I decided to row along the meadow bank to see if they had moved further in. I had no sooner got away from the lighthouse than I began to see my friends, the frogfish, strung along the shore, heads up on land, basking in the sunlight. In a half-mile row along the meadow bank I counted seventy-four of them enjoying the delights of Barnegat City as a summer resort. After three hours' fishing, with a catch of only six blackfish so small that I put them back in the water alive, I "tumbled," as it were. Here was the greatest blackfish hole of South Jersey—with nothing doing.

The explanation gradually dawned on me. Going ashore with the kedge, I hauled one of the biggest frogfish ashore and cut him open. The situation was then made clear. He was comfortably filled with blackfish. Glancing down the long line of heads ashore I ruminated sadly something like this: "Seventy-four frogfish equal about seventy-four bushels of blackfish, and who knows what else. No wonder there is little left for me."

As the ebb tide turned to flood several of my friends were dislodged from shore by the rising waters, and a curious sight resulted. Each one, as he was swept out by the tide, turned and persistently bucked against it, striving to get back, his tail working sinuously. In these efforts I photographed several of them bucking the tide, which grew stronger every moment, so that only one actually got a secure resting place for his head. One of the group which became dislodged was evidently still hungry. As the boat approached him he bristled up like a dog, his spines, or rays, showing all over him, and came straight for the boat. Big as his mouth was, he was unable to swallow the skiff, and he desisted with bad grace.

"HE BRISTLED UP LIKE A DOG, HIS SPINES ERECT ALL OVER HIM, AND CAME STRAIGHT AT THE BOAT."

When at last I cut open a big frogfish, with seven ducks and perhaps a bushel of fish inside, "Watts" Penn's story, after all, seemed tame. Here, it seemed to me, was work for the State Fish and Game Commission, all of the game wardens and assistants. Here, out of season, were monsters destroying more wild fowl than all the gunners kill in a season. What's the use of game laws in the presence of such gourmands as these, unbridled and unrestrained?

At night these monsters go hunting. Travelling along on the bottom unseen and unsuspected, with upward, slanting eyes, they locate the flock of ducks sleeping or the school of fish above them. The huge, cavernous jaws open wide, the monster silently rises and his prey disappears. Geese, loons, gulls and the largest as well as the smallest birds, lobsters, crabs or any living thing that will go in those jaws have no show for life. Although it is true that the frogfish gorges at night and digests by day, I am convinced that he has the same defective eyesight in daylight that owls have.

On returning to New York I visited the American Museum of Natural History to dig up what science knows about the angler fish. Dr. Louis Hussakof, associate curator, and John T. Nichols, assistant curator of fishes, kindly "showed" me.

They have a wide distribution on the coasts of Europe and North America. The first dorsal ray, inserted on the snout, is very long, movable in every direction and terminates in a dermal flap, which is supposed to be used by the frogfish as a bait, attracting other fishes, which are soon engulfed in the enormous gape. It is a fish of singular ugliness, its name, piscatorius, pertaining to an angler, in allusion to the baited dorsal spines which overhang the cavernous month.

The museum has only one small specimen of the frogfish, beautifully mounted. It also has several lantern slides made from two specimens said to have been captured at the wharves in this city. Considerable literature on angler fish exists at the museum, chiefly compiled at the United States National Museum by Dr. Theodore Gill, a great authority on fishes. Dr. Gill made ample study of the anatomy of this fish from specimens in hand, but the life history of its habits, such as are known, he seems to have compiled from a long line of observers from Cuvier down, which included the elder Agassiz, the late Spencer F. Baird, the late G. Brown Goode, etc. It seems remarkable luck to me that I was Johnny on the spot to greet a big school of frogfish, and that in three days I got perhaps more observations on them and had more intimate associations with them than the entire long line of illustrious ichthyologists.

W. H. BALLOU.

"Do you think they're happily married?"

"No question of it. He still lets her select his clothing."—Detroit Free Press.

The Suburbanite May Have His Root Garden, but the Gay New Yorker Has His Roof Garden

The Theatrical Folk Are Already Hoeing and Raking and Cultivating, and It Will Be Ready Soon.

Of Course There'll Be "Farmerettes" in Overalls and Silk Stockings—They're Real Gardeners.

THE roof gardeners are mighty busy just now, and it won't be long before their roofs will sprout and blossom with the dramatic and thirst quenching fruits of their efforts.

Many theatres along Broadway have retired behind boarded doors bearing the lettered announcements to whom it may concern that they have done with the season of 1910-'11 and will reopen at the old stand early in August with positively the hottest thing in musical comedy that this innately warm form of art has seen for many long years. Chorus girls have gone to spend the hot days at summer resorts, where they are allowed to enjoy themselves as long as it doesn't interfere with their dish hustling and cashier stand work.

Others, whose rabbit feet are working for them, have secured engagements in the choruses of summer garden shows. Others, still more fortunate, won't have to leave their beloved Broadway—may its shadow never grow less!

There aren't many of these ultra lucky chickens. The simple answer is that only one Broadway roof garden is going to have a chorus with its show this year. That is Ziegfeld's racy Jardin de Paris, on the top of the New York Theatre.

Up there under the roof garden's roof these afternoons a staff of callous managers and directors with voices like flint are showing a small army of lucky chorus broilers and luckier stars just how to handle themselves and the songs.

"Here, here you, Miss Babette de Boolaboola!" yells a coatless stage director to a young thing of thirty-odd who is going to be dressed in a four-year-old costume, "haven't you been in the business long enough to know how to take care of a short line? Don't come down stage like you was approaching your landlady for a stand-off on your board bill. And if it hurts you to get rid of the words don't let the audience see it. Hide your suffering 'neath a smiling face, as the poet says. Now, once more!"

And they keep Miss Babette at it until she can shoot that line over the plate under hand, overhand, with either hand, to the repressed satisfaction of the tyrant in shirtsleeves.

As to what surprises and sensations there are to be in the piece—ah, that would be telling! They have a rule down at the Jardin never to confess what they are going to spring until they spring it. Plagiarism is abroad in our fair land, and one can't be too careful with good songs. When you ask them to be specific and say just what kind of thrillers they are going to spring, they tell you exactly. The answer is:

"It's going to be a whizz—a dinger—a hummer!"

Now you know, don't you? One of their songs is going to be called "Never Again" though. I can tell you that much. The elevator boy who was conducting the hunt for the press agent didn't slam the door to in time to hide the view of the chorus in prosaic everyday dresses with their right hands raised to high heaven chanting:

"Never—no ne-e-ever again!"

It wouldn't be right to say that the girls look like everyday girls when they rehearse in everyday clothes. For the press agent tells us that the show is to open with 100 of the prettiest, classiest, most charming girls that can be scraped together with a fine toothed comb. He adds that the scraping is unusually good about this time of the year, too. Shows all over the country are closing and the merry artists of the light and fantastic are flocking back to the earth's centre at 42d and B-way to see what can be done in the way of three eats a day until the opening of next season ushers in another run of prosperity. This is true although a press agent did say it. At any rate you are requested to remember that the police will be interested in the opening as usual.

To-morrow night Hammerstein's Roof Garden and Suffragette Farm will open for the summer. This roof claims to be the old original, and is on the watershed of the Victoria variety theatre, at 42d street. There is one thing of which Hammerstein's is particularly proud, mark you!

"I grant," granted Mr. "Truthful" John Pollock, press representative for Hammerstein's, "that there are other roof gardens in New York. But none of them have what I am going to show you. Come this way." And he lead on past the auditorium, where the variety bill will be presented, to the back of the roof.

Painters were painting and carpenters were carping. The opening date wasn't so far to the front, and there was the usual hurried hammering and preponderance of fresh paint—the earmarks of rush. Having made his way through the muck of workers, Mr. Pollock gained the western edge of the roof and pointed upward.

"That is it," he said, proudly, "none of 'em can show you a thing like that without taking off their roof garden roof."

The visitor looked and saw nothing but space. He looked the second time with a parallel result. Then he had to admit with an apologetic smile that he didn't just quite get Mr. Pollock.

"Why, you are looking at it all the time," smiled that press representative. "It's the sky. The cerulean blue—the endless spaces—the glorious welkin! None of the other regular roof gardens can show that to their patrons. All the others have a covering between it and their auditorium. We have that, too, over the auditorium you will notice—but during the intermission you can wander out here with the lovely lady you brought along and admire the star studded heavens—take a slant at the silvery moon, and all that sort of poetic stuff. It's a fine little bit of auxiliary decoration for the Old Original Roof."

Hammerstein's "stunt" this summer is to be the suffragette farm. It is all to be there, including the real, live and living suffragette tillers of the fragrant soil. A farm, including a horse, cow, sundry chickens, divers ducks, bleating sheep and a genuine truck garden, all on a roof at Broadway and 42d street!

That ought to knock 'em off their seats, eh? Listen again, how it sounds:

A real farm in operation on Lobster Square.

They have absolutely pledged themselves to carry out the full programme, too. Last Tuesday Mr. Pollock put an "ad" in the paper, in the Help Wanted—Female column. The sort of female help wanted was the supposedly rare brand called suffragette farmers. The farm was there, and all the livestock had been engaged, but there wasn't any one to take charge, hence the "ad." There were plenty of answers—you know how it is when you advertise in the papers. Indeed, there were so many ambitious "lady rubes" that there was some difficulty in thrashing out—I use the metaphor advisedly—the real from the imitation.

At the end of a perspiring two hours fourteen had been chosen out of the hundred that had called. That hundred had included militant votes-for-women devotees who were willing to do the roof farm work free if they were allowed to speak to the audience every night. Others really were from the country, and could tell the difference between a rake and a hoe with their hands tied behind them. And there were still others.

"What farm experience have you had?" Pollock asked one buxom young person who was vigorously chewing a bit of durable gum.

"Experience!" sniffed that person, abandoning her gum no longer than was necessary, "why, I passed through the State of Iowa on a fast train once, when I was out with the Jolly Jolliers Company."

Nature, however, had fitted her with a generous physique, fit for a lady farmer, and Pollock put her in among the "ringers." He had secured beforehand the services of Miss Catherine Sherman, an expert in farming, claiming to be a graduate of Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont's farm for girls. By the way, isn't it remarkable how many hundreds of graduates that farm has ground out, even though it has been in existence only a few short weeks? There were five other applicants who knew how to pick up a scythe without scratching their patent leather slippers. All the rest are chorus girl "ringers."

The costume they will wear while engaged in metropolitan farm work will consist of an untrimmed creation of straw millinery which costs about two bits a head and is called a "straw cady" out in the rural districts, where they are exceedingly popular. Then there is the white waist, with the sleeves rolled up to give the round arms a chance to be seen. Over all a pair of overalls will be worn—real trousers they are. No mere blue jeans harem skirts. This costume requirement served to discourage several applicants of the speechmaking and tract scattering persuasion.

Leaving the overalls, we come to the stockings. These will be of silk. Lest their beauty be not wasted, all suffragette farmers will be required to keep their overalls rolled up at the bottom until they strike just this side of the knee. What would a summer garden be without a generous display of silken legs? It certainly wouldn't be a summer garden.

These lady hayseeds are to do all their farm work at night, during the intermissions in the variety bill. There is a truck farm, 30 by 60 feet in magnitude, where the girls will try to raise radishes, cabbages and green things like that. Miss Sherman says that she is going to use intensive farming methods in working the roof truck garden, and she confidently predicts that several potatoes will have been brought to robust manhood by the time the garden closes for the winter.

A cow by the name of Cordelia has taken up her residence on the roof, and one of the suffragettes will sic an electric milker on her each evening for the benefit of the audience. Also, there is a horse of the name of Hammerstein—called Hammer for short—which is to go through the ordeal of being shod and manicured once a day by a brawny lady farmer.

Now, of course, a horse's hoofs wouldn't last long at that rate if he got a genuine shoeing every time. So the suffragette isn't really going to try that on Hammer. What she doesn't know about the art of applying horse footwear would fill a couple of sets of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica"—but you ought to hear her beat on the anvil!

In addition there is to be a barber shop for sheep, with a lady barber at the wheel of the electric clippers. Look here what they have painted over the rustic cot where the sheep is to be sheared:

BAA-BAA SHOP.

Get it? See—Baa-baa shop! What does that remind you of? Don't you see? Baa-baa shop. How would a Southern woman pronounce the word "barber"? Why, something like this: "Ba'ba'." There you have it—baa-baa shop. Barber shop—where the sheep gets his hair cut. It's mighty good after you have tumbled to it. An explanation of the joke in parentheses is now being executed in red, white and blue stripes of paint and will be dry by to-morrow night.

There are other little things, like the duck pond with fish in it. Maybe there will be fishing lines that the members of the audience can use during the intermission. Of course, all these glories of rural America are to be surrounded by and interspersed with little one-legged tables where it won't be hard to buy a drink.

The horse and cow are to stall through the summer (get that joke?—thought it up just a minute ago) on the roof. About twice a week one of the stage hands will be allowed to take them down to the street level and give them a little exercise in the form of a promenade about Lobster Square, with collars and leashes on. Both the animals are oldtimers, which have lived through it before, and they expect to make it all right this season. During the winters, when they aren't working on the roof they are taken out to a full grown Jersey farm belonging to Harry Mook, superintendent of the building. It is admitted that the amount of truck produced and the pounds of butter donated by Cordelia via the electric milker and churn aren't going to have any downward effect on the lofty price we now pay for these necessities of life. Mr. Pollock says that we will have to gaze elsewhere for relief.

One garden blossomed forth last week and is in full swing as I write about it. That is the American Roof Garden, at 42d street and Eighth avenue. Like Hammerstein's, it has a vaudeville bill. Overhead is a canopy of counterfeit leaves, to make you forget about your surroundings and imagine that you are in the shady depths of a cool forest. Shimmering through the bogus leaves are little electric lights that are supposed to represent the stars, and to the right of the stage is a home-made moon, always full.

So have your white pants pressed and polish up your blond cane. The time has come when she will expect you to take her to the roof instead of staying on the street level.

F. S. TISDALE.