

# A Hunter of Rare and Unusual Game



## Chase Littlejohn Has Bagged Sea Otters in Japan, Big Game in Alaska & Strange Birds Everywhere

CHASE LITTLEJOHN WITH HIS FIRST WHITE-TAILED DEER SOUTH WESTERN ALASKA



MR STEVENS SKINNING BEAR'S CUB



NEST AND EGGS OF CALIFORNIA CLAPPER RAIL



STRING OF WESTERN CANADA GEESE



YOUNG FALCONS



YOUNG OF GREAT BLUE HERON IN NEST CALIFORNIA

### By H. A. Crafts

CHASE LITTLEJOHN was the first boy to be born in Redwood City, which is now a fine, flourishing town and has the proud distinction of being the county seat of San Mateo county. The town is situated, as nearly every one in these parts knows, down the peninsula, some 25 miles south of San Francisco, and Mr. Littlejohn still has his home there, although his birth dates away back in 1855, in the good old golden days.

### A Redwood Pioneer

The elder Littlejohn's home was in San Francisco at the time, but the town of Redwood City had ambitions, as many a town has today, and was anxious to secure recruits; so it held out inducements to the sturdy millwright and it was he who built the third house to be erected in the city in embryo. It was in that house that Chase Littlejohn was born and it was in Redwood City that he grew to boyhood.

There were few amusements in the little burg in those days and the boy was thrown upon his own resources. But on one side were the oak groves, grassy glades and redwood forests and on the other the bay of San Francisco, with its miles of marsh lands, stretching both to the north and the south.

So for a good healthy boy there was ample opportunity for good, healthy amusement, and young Chase's principal amusement was to hunt birds

and birds' eggs in the forests and on the marshes. Even while yet a mere toddler he gathered birds' eggs and strung the shells upon threads, until he had yards of them. Thus he acquired a taste for ornithology, which stuck to him ever afterward and is today his chief delight.

And it was this taste that led him to take long voyages and to embark in many a wild adventure. The San Francisco peninsula became altogether too narrow for one of his tastes and ambitions. He longed to beat out into the open sea more of the great world.

Accordingly, when but yet a lad of 18, he hired out with a San Francisco fur concern to go to Japan to hunt sea otter. He sailed upon a 70-ton schooner and in due course of time was in the waters of the Kurile islands, where the sea otter in those days abounded in large numbers.

The Kurile islands are situated in the northernmost part of the Japanese archipelago, and formerly were owned by Russia, but afterward came into the possession of Japan.

The fur of the sea otter has always been of great value in a commercial way, and has grown more and more valuable with time. In the days when Chase Littlejohn hunted the animal a single skin was worth about \$200; today the price runs from \$1,500 to \$2,000, so rare has the otter become.

The fur of the full grown sea otter is of a pure jet black, very fine and glossy. In the early days the fur found an almost exclusive market in Russia, where it was used in trimming the uniforms of the army officers. The fur secured by the California hunters was cured and packed in San Francisco and then shipped to London, which was the principal market for the commodity at that time.

The hunting of the sea otter in the Japanese waters was a perilous undertaking, and schooner after schooner has been lost and never afterward heard from. The waters are rough and stormy, heavy seas descend upon the seas, sweeping all before them.

farer. But, although Chase Littlejohn and his fellow otter hunters had many a narrow escape from shipwreck and drowning, they came safely through, and were successful in nearly all of their voyages. They came home laden with spoils and their product was always disposed of at a good profit.

The full grown sea otter is usually a little more than four feet long, but some skins have been secured that measured 36 inches from tip to tip. Unlike the fur seal, the sea otter lives the greater part of its time off shore. It swims upon its back, and will lie for hours in that position, asleep upon the surface of the water.

They run in schools, and Mr. Littlejohn has seen as many as 200 in a single bunch. Their food consists principally of crustaceans, or minute shellfish, found in the waters of the ocean. This food they dive for, and in diving the sea otter turns quickly over from its accustomed recumbent position on the surface of the water and goes down back upmost.

Unlike the seal, again, it has front legs and small paws, but no hind legs, the members in the rear consisting of a tail and two short flippers. The animal is a vicious fighter when cornered, and uses its sharp teeth with good effect.

In hunting the sea otter the hunters are formed into squads, three boats to the squad and four men to the boat, with two men at the oars, one in the bow as a lookout and one at the stern to steer the boat with a paddle.

The hunters start out pulling along the islands from half a mile to a mile from the land, a sharp watch being kept all the time among the patches of kelp and other sea drift for an otter poking his small head above the surface.

The boats of a squad always move in the shape of a triangle or wedge in order that the men may have an opportunity to shoot the otter without being in danger of hitting other hunters of the party.

An otter being discovered by the men in the forward boat, a paddle is raised as a signal of discovery, and the signal is answered by the raising of a paddle in each of the rear boats. Then all move forward, watching for a chance to get a shot at the otter.

At the first shot the otter dives into the sea and then the three boats draw near the place of disappearance to await the animal's rise. At the first reappearance of the otter another shot is taken, and the animal dives again, and again the hunters await another rise.

About the third dive exhausts the otter, and it must stay above and make the best fight it can. Then the hunters get in the fatal shot, and when the animal is dead it is dragged into one of the boats and the hunt is continued.

sea otter seldom sinks, the fur of the animal evidently acting as a buoy. It is, therefore, no difficult task to land the game. In some of these hunts it was no uncommon thing in the old days for a schooner's crew thus divided into squads to capture as many as 25 otter in one day. The number of skins secured during a single voyage used to range from 300 to 500.

But in these later days of scarcity, sea otter hunting is a very different proposition, and it takes long and hard searches to find them.

In the early days San Francisco used to send out as many as 75 otter hunting schooners in a single season, but nearly all were lost first or last, by being foundered in gales or swept ashore on the rocks. Never a year passed without the loss of two or three of these craft.

In some of Littlejohn's voyages he joined in hunts for fur seals also; but the hunting was done on a different plan from that employed in sea otter hunting. The seals were hunted far out at sea, and the boats were followed by the schooner. Out there seals were found sleeping on the surface, and they were killed with shotguns.

But after a while the Japanese "rot wire" to the value of the sea otter and put a summary stop to the expeditions. They sent a revenue cutter out and drove off all the fleet, and that was the end of the game as far as foreign hunters were concerned.

### He Goes to Alaska

In 1873 Littlejohn joined in an expedition to Alaskan waters, and they were hunting otter, bear and seal, trapping and trading with the natives. They ran into a bay that was virtually alive with sea otter, very much to their surprise. They made a good killing, therefore, and sailing into Victoria cured their hides and shipped them to London from that point.

That expedition gave Littlejohn a hint that he might do some hunting on his own account; so in 1880 he returned to San Francisco and outfit for himself.

But he found great difficulty in securing transportation north for more than one reason; and the principal reason was that the fur companies did not wish to encourage independent hunting. At last, however, an opportunity offered, and Littlejohn, accompanied by his father, wife and a friend, named Stevens, set sail for the arctic latitudes and finally located on Marjovia bay, near the south end of the Alaskan peninsula, and there the party remained for three years, hunting, fishing and trading with the natives.

They carried with them a portable house and this was set up in a favorable location, and then it was walled up; or, in other words, it was loaded up on the outside with sods dug up in the neighborhood to a thickness of four feet, and then the roof was heavily thatched with coarse wild grass that grows round about in great profusion.

This made the building completely impervious to cold and wind and no discomfort from those sources was experienced at any time during their stay. In fact, the entire party was well, happy and contented for the whole period. They took along a good supply of provisions, and besides this they had bountiful supplies of fish, game and berries that abounded on all sides. They also planted a patch of vegetables which in season added much to their supply of eatables.

The principal difficulty in truck farming in that region, however, was the undue familiarity shown by the bears, which insisted upon paying frequent nocturnal visits to the Littlejohn domicile and sampling various things, both eatable and uneatable, including the boats that lay moored on the beach, more than one mouthful having been taken from objects not less digestible.

At the end of the three years Mr. Littlejohn and his party returned home, where they remained two years, and then concluded to make another voyage to the northland. This time Littlejohn fitted out his own steam launch and so voyaged forth, free and independent. The party was made up as before and they settled again upon the old site on Marjovia bay.

Again the wild life was taken up, but now Littlejohn had more opportunity and leisure to pursue his ornithological researches. He had never ceased in all the years he had been traversing the broad Pacific to secure specimens of rare birds and their eggs. Even while crossing the wide and watery wastes he lost no opportunity to capture a bird, and in this way secured such deep sea fowls as the stormy petrel, albatross, booby, man of war hawk, boateater or tropic bird, etc.

The albatross he was wont to catch with a hook as they followed the ship. Some crumbs of food would be thrown overboard and then the birds would flock about them in great numbers, and some one of the number could be quite easily hooked.

The petrels could only be caught at night when they would come flying across deck, when they could be caught in a hat.

It was a practice of the sea otter hunters to stop at the Midway islands, both outward and inward bound, and on these islands are found great bird colonies and many of the migratory species. And nearly all of the birds on the Midway islands were remarkably tame, so that a person might go right up to them and take them from their nests.

Here were found two species of the tern, the plover, curlew, etc., and of the eggs of these species Littlejohn gathered a great number, preserved them, and now has them in his collection at his home in Redwood City.

It was during his visits to the Alaskan shores that he indulged himself in bird hunting and bird study to the top

of his bent. He had ample time and thus was enabled to get the full joy of the pastime. Whole days were spent boating along the shore or wandering inland in pursuit of the feathered tribe. He gathered eggs by the thousand and many of these were utilized as food. Sea gulls' eggs were gathered by the barrel and salted down.

There were small islands just off shore that were virtually laden with birds and their eggs. To these islands Littlejohn used to repair for a harvest of eggs. He would seek nests containing just three eggs each, because he would know that these eggs were fresh. Of the three he would appropriate two and mark the remaining one, which was left as a nest egg, to be gathered in a few days he would make another visit and take home the fresh eggs, and could keep the process up almost indefinitely, as the birds seemed never to tire of laying eggs for him.

In that northern clime Littlejohn found a great variety of birds, both of land and sea, and of their lives and habits he made a thorough study.

Among the more interesting of the species was the ancient murrelet, a bird about the size of an ordinary quail. This bird breeds in great numbers and its nests are found all over the islands lying off the Alaskan coast. But it takes an expert to find the nests, as it is one of the peculiarities of the bird to hide its nest. More often it will burrow in the thick matting of wild grasses that is found covering much of the land and under this matting conceal its eggs. It will even burrow down into the ground in order to find a hiding place.

The female of this species lays just two eggs to a setting and upon these eggs the male and female take turns in setting, each taking a turn of 24 hours. As soon as one bird is relieved by its mate it flies out to sea in quest of food, and this food consists principally of crustacean growths. At dark the ancient murrelet flies homeward and then the air round about the nesting places fairly swarms with them.

In 1894 Littlejohn went to Alaska in the interest of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington to secure specimens of birds and their eggs. He was very successful and secured some 400 birds and 3,500 eggs, many of which have been installed in the celebrated institution at the national capital.

It was during this trip that Littlejohn secured a specimen of the bird known as Peale's falcon, a very rare bird, indeed, as the finder claims that this is the only captured specimen in the world. He secured a female and three eggs, but it was only after great effort.

The bird is very wild and fierce, building its nest in secret and almost inaccessible places in the steep cliffs of the seashore, sometimes hundreds of feet above the water's edge.

On one of his previous visits Mr. Littlejohn had discovered the whereabouts of one of these nests, but could not exactly locate it. This time he resolved to locate it if such a thing were possible.

He knew that the nest was somewhere in the face of a steep cliff near the camping place; so, arising one morning before daybreak he rowed to the place and hid behind a rock, gun in hand. Then he waited for the day to dawn and when it was fairly light he stood up in his boat and gave a series of loud hallos.

In the meantime he scanned the face of the cliff carefully and soon saw one of the birds emerge from a nook quite high above the water and make a savage sweep down toward him. But he quickly raised his shot-gun and killed the fowl before it could attack him.

The dead bird fell into the sea and

the hunter rowing to the spot easily secured his prey. It was a female, and this is the bird that constitutes the rarest of specimens in Littlejohn's collection.

The next thing was to secure the eggs from the falcon's nest. Happily, by great watchfulness, Littlejohn had marked with his eye the spot whence the bird had emerged from the cliff and was able to point it out to his two comrades, one of whom was a young and agile fellow, who volunteered to allow himself to be lowered from the top of the eminence in quest of the eggs.

From a neighboring camp a stout rope was secured and the three hunters repaired to the top of the cliff and the young man was lashed to the rope and lowered over the brink of the precipice.

It was agreed that a shout from the young man should be the signal to the men above to stop lowering. So the two men lowered away until they heard shouting below them. But the shouting did cease; on the contrary it was more strenuous than before, and it appeared to carry with it a note of distress.

Leaving Littlejohn to hold the rope, his companion ran hastily around a point, whence he could get a view of the young egg hunter, and there he saw the young man suspended in midair and spinning around at the rope's end like a top.

He had been caught by a current of wind and thus set spinning and his shouting had been for the men above not to stop lowering, but to lower all the faster in order to relieve the situation.

The lowering was resumed and the young man finally gave the signal to stop. It was then discovered that the point selected for lowering was about 20 feet too far to one side; so the young man had to be lowered all the way down, taken on a boat and then a second attempt was made, and this was successful, the nest being reached and three eggs secured.

The hazardous nature of this undertaking may be realized when it is stated that the face of the cliff was broken so that the first 150 feet was slightly inclined, the next 150 feet shelving and the remaining 150 again on an incline.

### Bagged Many Bears

Bear hunting was one of the favorite pastimes of Littlejohn and his party in their Alaskan expeditions. Both brown and grizzly bears were found to be plentiful, and it was easy to hunt them, for the reason that the country was bare of timber and the air very clear, so that an animal became visible at a long distance.

One day Littlejohn went out bear hunting accompanied by a couple of natives. They came upon a big brown bear and a cub. The cub was shot first, and then the old bear, infuriated at the death of her young, made a rush for the party, and was about to sweep down upon the two Alaskans when a shot from Littlejohn's rifle put an end to her.

Two years ago Littlejohn was a member of Miss Annie Alexander's expedition to southeastern Alaska in quest of specimens for the museum recently established by Miss Alexander in Berkeley. The party consisted of seven members, and the expedition was very successful, seven new species of birds and mammals having been obtained, including a new kind of beaver.

At present Littlejohn is at home in Redwood City resting from his arduous labors in the northern wilds. In the meantime he continues his local researches and is adding to his collection all the time. He does not claim to have the largest collection on the coast, but that he has the most varied and representative he claims without fear of successful contradiction.