

The Case of a Crow and a Ruffed Grouse.— On May 12, 1912, while automobiling through Stoughton, Mass., Mr. Charles A. Coolidge suddenly came upon a Crow flying slowly across the road with a heavy burden. In its efforts to escape, the Crow dropped its booty, which proved to be a dead Ruffed Grouse, still warm as in life.

My examination elicited the following facts: An adult female Ruffed Grouse, weighing one and a quarter pounds; abdomen entirely bare as in incubation; feathers back of right ear and below left eye stained with blood; eyes intact; many feathers on the right side of the neck and some on the left side, including the whole of the neck-tuft on that side, missing. An effusion of blood the size of a silver dollar in the muscles of the right breast, and a few small subcutaneous ones on both breasts; an irregular rent in the skin a quarter of an inch long behind the right ear, and much clotted blood there and around the exterior of the base of skull and neck; a slight tear in the skin below the left eye. The skull was not injured and the brain was intact. There were no signs of gun-shot injury.

The ovary was full of small eggs, none larger than a number six shot. The crop was stuffed with the young leaves and flower buds of the apple, and the stomach was filled with the semi-digested remains of the same. The bird was plump and in good condition, and showed no signs of disease.

The interpretation of these post-mortem findings and of the observed history is a matter for conjecture and the following theories are offered:

(1) That the Crow flying close to the ground in open woods perceived the incubating Grouse, who, trusting to her protective coloration, remained immobile on her nest, and received her death blow behind the right ear.

(2) That the Crow in attempting to steal the chicks of the Grouse was set upon by the irate mother with the disastrous results observed.

(3) That the Crow attacked the Grouse while busily engaged in budding the apple tree, and that the stunned bird fell to the ground where a few more blows finished it.

(4) That the Grouse was killed by a hawk, was abandoned and at once seized by the Crow.

(5) That the Grouse killed itself by flying against some obstacle, and that its dead body was at once taken by the Crow.

The fall of the Grouse to the ground before life was entirely extinct, which might have happened according to theory 3, 4 and 5 would account for the contusion and hemorrhage of the breast. This hemorrhage would not have occurred when the Crow dropped the dead body into the road. It hardly seems probable that a hawk would have abandoned such a rich booty, or that it would not have left marks of its talons. In the case of an obstacle one would expect to find hemorrhage over or under the front of the skull. By exclusion therefore, theory number 3 seems to be the most probable one.

In whatever way the tragedy occurred it is certainly surprising that a Crow should have succeeded in flying with such a heavy burden as a Ruffed Grouse, and on this account alone, if for no other, the case is worth putting on record.— CHARLES W. TOWNSEND, M. D., *Boston, Mass.*



Townsend, Charles Wendell. 1912. "The Case of a Crow and a Ruffed Grouse." *The Auk* 29, 542–542. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4071802>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/54327>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/4071802>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/86320>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries

Sponsored by

Smithsonian

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.