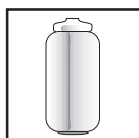


inspired to write about (Prov. 30:28), is spelled out again for us in the modern terms of the computer programme that is used repeatedly time and again without error. One of the most breathtakingly beautiful sights we can see on an autumn morning is a spider's web in a field or on trees. The author describes the marvellous mechanism, programmed into the spider's DNA, whereby the web is rapidly and unerringly manufactured, and the spider is enabled, as Agur said, to be "in king's palaces".

The booklet ends with a review entitled, appropriately enough, "The Finger of God". The booklet is commended to the children and young people in our midst, who need to be encouraged to see the clear and logical arguments that there are against evolution, and to those who are of older years but who have retained their youthful interest in, and enthusiasm for, the wonderful works of creation which surround us in constant witness to the wisdom and mercy of Him Who has made all things well.



Prophecy, History and Archaeology

EDITOR: Tony Benson, 26 Tiercel Avenue, Norwich,
NR7 8JN. Tel./Fax 01603 412978;
email: tony.benson3@ntlworld.com

The Sinai Peninsula

5. The birds of Sinai (Part 1)*

David Green

THOUGH ANIMALS tend to be rare in Sinai, quite a number of species live there. These include gazelles, ibex, leopards, wild cats, sand foxes, jackals, hares, hedgehogs and moles. In addition there are indigenous birds such as falcons and eagles, together with the temporary presence of a number of migrating species, such as quails, cranes and storks.

As with the trees and shrubs of Sinai, dealt with in the [previous article](#), it is not possible within the scope of this study to give a comprehensive survey of all the species associated with the area. Those selected will be in most cases ones that are mentioned in the Bible. This article and the [following one](#) consider some of the characteristic birds of the Sinai region,¹ and a [further article](#) will consider some of the animals.

The quail

The quail referred to in the Bible is the common migratory quail, the only migratory species of its kind. It is found in Europe, Asia and North Africa and is a summer visitor to the UK, though usually rather scarce. These birds are small and plump, about seven inches long, with a very small tail. Their plumage is buff and brown mottled, barred and streaked with black, dark brown and white.

In the past, migratory quails were found in tremendous numbers in the Middle East, and were easily knocked down with sticks or trapped with nets, as they fly low, only about three or four feet above the ground. They feed on seeds, green shoots, insects, small snails and other small invertebrates. On migration they tend to keep to small parties of no more than forty birds. The Hebrew name for quail is *selav*, having the meaning of 'sluggishness', from their slowness in flight, and the Arabic is *salwa*, signifying 'to be fat', describing the round form and the fat flesh of these birds.²

The children of Israel were miraculously supplied with quail on two occasions during their wilderness journey. The first was while they were in the Wilderness of Sin (Ex. 16:12,13), and then again, about one year later, on a much larger scale, after leaving Sinai, at the place called Kibroth Hattaavah (Graves of Craving). On that

-
- * Quotations from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.
1. The details provided in this article are for the most part taken from *Purnell's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Animal Life* and *The Natural History of the Bible*, H. B. Tristram, second edition, 1868, SPCK.
 2. *Strong's Concordance* and Tristram, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

occasion a wind from God brought the quails from the direction of the Red Sea to the area of the Israelites' camp, it being the time of their spring migration. Being weary from their long flight, and flying close to the ground (about two cubits), the quails would be easily caught in sufficient quantities to last them a whole month (Num. 11:20,31-34). To preserve the flesh for this period of time they spread them out "all around the camp" (v. 32) so as to dry them in the sun. This same method was sometimes used by the Egyptians to preserve fish, but, according to Herodotus, the Egyptians preserved quail by salting them.³

It is said that when quails migrate they "fly for the most part by night". The Biblical record agrees with this, as it refers to them arriving in the evening (twilight) on the first occasion, and says that the Israelites stayed up all night to collect them on the second occasion, though they did also collect them in the daytime. They tend to rely on the wind, flying with it and crossing stretches of water at the narrowest point.

In the spring, quail migrate northwards from Africa, following the west coast of the Red Sea. They then, with a favouring west or southwest wind, cross over the narrower parts of the Gulf of Suez to the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. This fits the first occasion mentioned above, when the Israelites were in the Wilderness of Sin. For the second, Numbers 11 states that "there went forth a wind from the LORD and brought quails from the sea" (v. 31), but in this case the nearest sea would be the Gulf of 'Aqabah. Perhaps those quails first crossed over from Africa into Arabia (Yemen) at the lower end of the Red Sea and then continued north up the east coast of the sea until a favourable wind took them across into Sinai. In the first century B.C. the birds were being caught in immense numbers in the northern Sinai area of El 'Arish.⁴

The ostrich

Today five subspecies of ostrich roam Africa. A sixth used to be found in the deserts of the Middle East and became extinct in Israel early in the last century. Since the bird is mentioned in several books of the Bible, it seems reasonable to suppose that it was well known to the Israelites and found in the wilderness areas of the Holy Land and Sinai.

The three Hebrew bird names listed below probably refer to the ostrich, though there is some disagreement concerning the first of these:

Bath Ya'anah. *Ya'anah* may be from the root 'to give' or 'send back'. It is thought to have been applied to the ostrich because of their loud and hideous crying to each other. Therefore the meaning of this name is 'daughter of shouting', though Jewish tradition gives an alternative meaning, 'daughter of greed'. It is translated 'ostrich' in the NKJV and 'owl' in the AV and NIV, for example in Leviticus 11:16. A number of passages referred to below have 'owl' rather than 'ostrich' in the AV.

Ya'en. This means 'to pay attention', probably from its answering cry, and is found only in Lamentations 4:3.

Renen. This means 'a bird of piercing cries', and is used, for example, in Job 39:13.

The ostrich is the largest bird presently existing, weighing up to eighty pounds and averaging a height of seven feet, though a large male may reach up to eight feet. The neck accounts for nearly half the bird's height. The female and the young birds have brown or dusky-grey plumage, whereas the male is black with white plumes on the wings and the tail. It has been observed that the bird always avoids settled areas and seldom approaches cultivated fields, so that it is truly a bird to be found "in the wilderness" (Lam. 4:3). It is fitting, therefore, that it is mentioned as being an inhabitant of desolate and uninhabited places such as Babylon and Idumea (Isa. 13:21; 34:13; Jer. 50:39).

Large flocks of ostriches move about in the dry season looking for food, but during the rainy season they split up into small units for breeding. The ostrich is normally polygamous, and the breeding unit commonly contains about three hens. Over a three-week period the hens of a harem lay six to eight eggs each in a single depression in the ground, which may be as much as three yards across. When the laying has been completed the dominant female drives away the other hens and incubates the eggs. In the daytime this may involve keeping them cool by shading them from the sun with an outstretched wing, or covering them with sand. The male ostrich helps the hen with guarding the nest as well as with the incubation duties. Towards the end of

3. Herodotus, ii. 77.

4. *Scripture Natural History*, Carpenter, p. 406, sixth edition, 1836, SPRK, quoting Diodorus Siculus, a Greek historian who travelled in Egypt during the years 60-57 B.C.

the six-week incubation period those eggs most advanced in incubation are rolled into other depressions at the side of the nest in order to synchronise hatching as much as possible.

There are times when the eggs or chicks may fall prey to predators such as jackals: "For she leaves her eggs on the ground and warms them in the dust; she forgets that a foot may crush them, or that a wild beast may break them" (Job 39:14,15). This is more likely to happen to those few eggs that are dropped carelessly and scattered around in the area of the nest after it has been closed. It has been claimed that these are used for food by the newly hatched chicks.

Adult ostriches can reach a speed of forty miles per hour, and even month-old chicks can manage thirty-five miles per hour. Consequently the older birds cannot be run down directly by someone on horseback: "When she lifts herself on high, she scorns the horse and its rider" (v. 18). Ostriches tend to keep to a familiar territory by running in a circle, so it is possible to catch them by having extra groups of hunters riding off in directions at right angles to the chase to intercept the birds when they are fatigued.

The Bedouin have particularly valued the tail and wing feathers for decorative purposes, the most precious being the spotless white plumes of the male. Because of this, ostrich chases have been a favourite employment for desert tribes in the past. Job's comment that "the wings of the ostrich wave proudly" (v. 13) refers not only to the fact that ostriches have striking and beautiful plumes but also to the fact that, when they fight, display or flee from pursuit they tend to expand and vibrate their wings.

The seeming indifference of the ostrich for her chicks when they are too young to run away is probably the basis for the ascription of cruelty in Lamentations 4:3: "the daughter of my people is become cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness". The ostrich will run away when humans approach, leaving its chicks to their fate: "She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers" (Job 39:16, AV). There also seems to be some evidence that nests of eggs or even the young have on occasions been found forsaken by the adult birds.

The wailing of the ostrich is referred to in Micah: "I will make a wailing like the jackals and a mourning like the ostriches" (1:8). Job makes a similar comparison: "I go about mourning . . . I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches" (30:28,29). Tristram remarks that "the

cry of the ostrich, which is often emitted at night, is a loud, dolorous, and stridulous sound, and in the stillness of the desert-plains may be heard at a great distance . . . To my own ear it sounded like the hoarse lowing of an ox in pain".⁵

The ostrich is listed as unclean in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Lev. 11:16; Deut. 14:15). Presumably this is because of its feeding habits. In the desert it gets much of its water from succulent plants. It is also said to eat the snails feeding on their food plants, together with other small animals such as lizards.

Partridges

The sand or desert partridge is to be found all year round in Sinai, the Negev and the Arabah. It is particularly numerous around the Dead Sea and inhabits broken rocky or stony areas with minimal vegetation, but avoids open desert sands. It is a very agile bird, running up and down rocky hillsides. It often lays its eggs in holes in caves as well as under the shelter of rock crevices. The Hebrew word for partridge is *qore'*, which means 'the caller', from the very characteristic and distinctive call notes by which the male birds of different species mark their presence and challenge one another.

In addition to the sand partridge, there are two larger species of partridge found in the Holy Land, the chukar and the black francolin. These feed mainly on plant materials such as seeds, berries and young shoots, with a small percentage of insects, mainly ants and their pupae. Most probably the sand partridge has a similar but less varied diet.

There are only two mentions of the partridge in the Bible. In the first, David, when pursued by Saul, likens himself to a partridge being hunted in the mountains (1 Sam. 26:20). This passage alludes to one of the methods used for hunting partridges. When chased, the partridges of the Holy Land tend to escape by running, but are fairly easily fatigued, and then may be knocked down with sticks. It has been suggested that, out of the three varieties of this bird likely to be found in the areas frequented by David, the sand partridge fits his comparison the best: "Its short flights from place to place when hunted; its hiding trusting to its invisibility on account of its colour being so like the environment; its quick

5. *Op. cit.*, p. 234. 'Stridulous' means 'emitting a harsh creaking sound'.

run from danger before taking to wing; and its final capture when too wearied to fly—must form a very suitable image of a poor human fugitive remorselessly pursued”.⁶

The other mention occurs in Jeremiah: “As a partridge that broods [mg. sits on eggs] but does not hatch, so is he that gets riches but not by right; it will leave him in the midst of his days” (17:11). This passage probably refers to the fact that, because partridge eggs are laid on the ground, they are very vulnerable to predators, including humans, who collect them in considerable quantities for food. Ill-gotten wealth will be

lost just as surely as the partridge loses her eggs. Alternatively, it may refer to the fact that when a partridge is disturbed it may abandon its eggs and never return to its nest. The NIV paraphrase, “Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay” (compare the AV margin), is unsupported by observation.

(To be continued)

-
6. E. W. G. Masterman, p. 682, *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible*, Seventh impression, 1929, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh.

The Jews of Iraq

Tony Benson

THE FALL OF Saddam Hussein's brutal régime in Iraq last spring caused Jewish magazines to publish articles about the Jews of Iraq.¹ The point was made that the Jewish community of Iraq is the oldest Jewish community of the Diaspora (a word derived from the Greek for 'scatter', and used to indicate the Jews scattered from their native land). And indeed, modern Iraq covers the core territories of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires into which Jews were taken captive in two main waves, about a hundred years apart, 2,600 to 2,700 years ago.

The fate of the captives from the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, who were taken into captivity by the Assyrians about 2,700 years ago, is, of course, one of the great mysteries of history. It has led to many fanciful ideas about the fate of these 'lost' tribes. In recent times there was a community of Jews living among the Kurds in northern Iraq, speaking a form of Aramaic, and distinct in their ways from the much more numerous Jews of southern Iraq, and these might have been a remnant of part of the northern tribes.

Regarding the Babylonian captivity, although, as recorded particularly in the book of Ezra, there was a return of groups of exiled Jews from Babylon in the days of the Persian Empire, about 500 years before Christ, many Jews remained in the area. This area was never part of the Roman Empire, and in the time of Christ was part of the territory of Persia once more (the Greeks had ruled there for part of the intervening period), remaining so until the Arabs, with their new

religion of Islam, conquered it about 600 years later.

In these years of Persian rule the Jews of Babylonia established a rich and vibrant Jewish culture, especially after revolts in Palestine against Roman rule had resulted in the destruction of much of the Jewish community there. It was there that the Babylonian Talmud was compiled during the period A.D. 300 to 500, and this enormous compilation of material from the Jewish sages has become central to Judaism. In the centuries that followed the Arab conquest, the Jews of Babylonia continued to be numerous, prosperous and influential, excelling in such areas as medicine, finance and commerce, the kind of things Jews are still noted for today. Though they had their times of difficulties when control of the area passed to different powers, the various Muslim rulers were generally favourable to the Jews, in contrast to Christian nations.

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the area had been part of the Ottoman Empire for about 400 years, but one outcome of this war was that the Turks were driven out. A country then known as Mesopotamia, but later as Iraq, was carved out, and ruled by Britain until 1932, when it became fully independent. At this time the Jews were still flourishing there; on the eve of the First World War a third of the population

-
1. "By the rivers of Babylon", *Jerusalem Report*, 19 May 2003; "Baghdad's Jews", *International Jerusalem Post*, 23 May 2003.