

## THE CAPERCAILZIE IN ROTHIEMURCHUS.

BY C. G. CASH, F.R.S.G.S.

THE Capercaillie is the largest game-bird of the British Islands. It was formerly common in Scotland, but became extinct at the end of the eighteenth century. In the middle of the nineteenth century it was re-introduced into Perthshire, and has gradually spread throughout a considerable range of the southern aspect of the Grampians and in some of the Highland valleys.

Last year a single bird made its appearance in Rothiemurchus. The first report of it came from Jock Mackintosh, the local butcher, who one day drove furiously into Inverdrue from the Coylum Bridge road, filled with the mingled terror and glory of a strange tale. He had been attacked by a golden eagle, which, attracted by the odour of the flesh in his cart, had clawed and threshed at his head and shoulders; he had laid about him vigorously with his whip, thereby driving off his assailant—and his horse. Jock's story aroused enquiry, and it soon became evident that there was some unusual and unusually large bird in the wood on the south side of the road and up the brae beyond the Tinkers' Corner. Mr. Dempster, the schoolmaster at Inverdrue, made careful investigation, and through his field-glass saw a fine capercaillie strutting about like a turkey-cock, talking to itself, and quite deserving its popular name of 'Cock of the Woods.'

Of course, when once the comparatively harmless nature of Jock's assailant became known, others went to see it, and several of them had a rather warm reception. The schoolchildren had several battles royal with the bird, which would come on to the road as they passed, and attack them. One good man, who vaingloriously boasted himself not a little before the event, was tumbled over, and came rolling down the bank in wild combat with the pugnacious bird. Even a keeper's stick was not enough to daunt it, but was furiously pecked at. There seemed to be no mate with the cock, and



its unusually fierce disposition suggests that it was perhaps a 'rogue' cock, carrying on a solitary life apart from the rest of its species.

During last summer I had no opportunity of seeing it, for on the only day when I was in its neighbourhood, I found seven tinkers searching for its whereabouts, and I deemed it wise to know nothing of any 'big bird,' and came away. This spring, however, being in the same district, I went one day to see whether I could get a sight of the bird. I left the forest foot-path near the site of the old Free Church and walked towards Inverdrue. Almost at once I saw the bird some hundred yards away, standing at attention on a little plateau not far from the Coylum Bridge road. As I slowly and quietly approached, the bird saw me, and began to strut about much as a turkey-cock would. It uttered a curious cry, and accompanied the cry with a curious gesture. It carried its head very high in the air, the beak pointing nearly straight up, and exclaimed, "Cok! cok!" Then lowering its head, it swept it downwards and forwards, and raised it again, during this movement continuing its cry with a curious guttural exclamation which sounded remarkably like "Good-afternoon." These gestures and cries were repeated many times in somewhat rapid succession. Still approaching, I halted several times to look at the bird through the field-glass, and had a very good sight of its characteristic plumage, the glossy bronze-green of the breast, the brown speckled wings, each with a large white spot on the shoulder, the ring of white spots on the under surface of the proudly spread tail, and the striking patch of rich crimson over the eye. Truly he was a fine bird, and carried himself right gallantly. I was not afraid of his attack—for had I not met and overcome the previously unconquered bully turkey-cock of a Highland farm?—but I advanced cautiously, for I came as a spectator, not as a combatant. Somewhat to my surprise, however, the bird would not allow me to approach nearer than some twenty feet, but retreated with loud and angry cries. As I continued to advance, it took wing, and alighted in a tree some fifty yards to the south; when I still followed, it flew over my head, and crossed to the north side of the road. Hearing

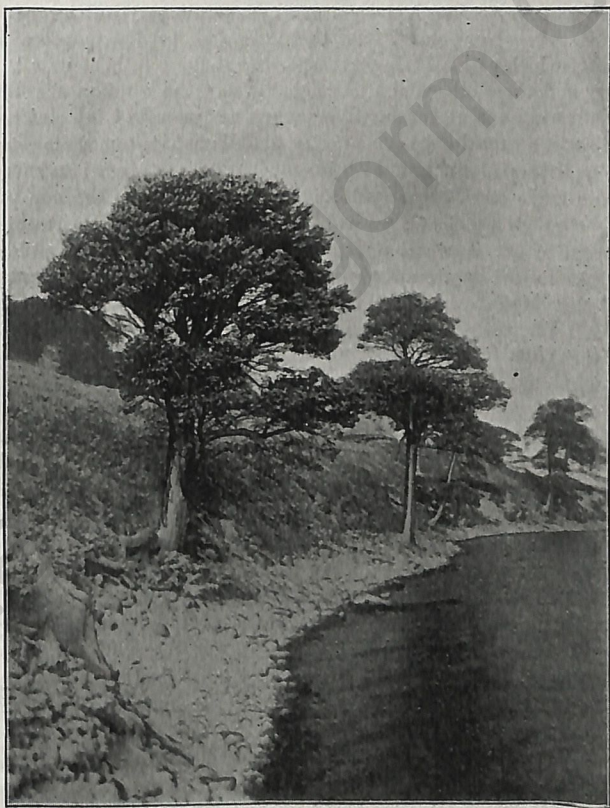


children shouting at it there, I crossed the road, and the children ran away. The bird was perched in a large fir tree, and when I got too near, it flew back to its little plateau, where I left it.

The next day I went again, taking my wife to see the new visitor. We approached as I had done on the previous day, and when we came near the bird's plateau we heard the sounds of strife at the road fence. Here was the bird carrying on a fight with yesterday's children, who were throwing sticks at him. When the children saw me, they ran away, and the bird began to return to his plateau, but would not approach nearer than he had done on the previous day, and after a short promenade with much vocal protest he again flew away as he had previously done. I left the field-glass with my wife, and went to drive him gently towards her, so that she might have a close view. When I had made a circuit, I approached his tree from the remoter side, and he flew towards her, alighting in a tree near the edge of his plateau, and being well within her view. Wishing to get him if possible yet closer, I made another detour, and very slowly approached the tree. The bird stood on it indignantly watching me and scolding till I got very near, and then flew down, alighting within a few yards of my wife. I called out to her that she would be safe if she would keep her walking stick towards him so as to guard against attack, and began myself to approach more quickly. The bird, while down on the ground, was for a few moments without sight of me, and, seeing only a somewhat defenceless woman, he at once put on all the airs of a swaggering bully, and approached her in full strut with loud and rapidly repeated cries. I advanced now at the run, still shouting to my wife to keep her stick towards him. But when I leapt up on to the plateau my shouts of advice changed into shouts of laughter; for these two, at barely two yards distance, were slowly circling round a small tree, glowering at each other; the bird, with head raised, eyes gleaming, tail uplifted, and wings wide-spread, was fairly dancing and screaming with the rage of battle; the lady, divided between delighted interest and apprehension, with field-glass and stick close hugged, was warily keeping



the tree as a protection, and exclaiming with rising emphasis, "No! no! birdie! No! no! birdie!! No! no! birdie!!!" My swift entry on the scene broke up the comedy, the defeated bird quickly retired, and the lady, with a gasp of relief and delight, apostrophised him with exclamations of admiration: "Oh, you beauty!" He still strutted about, but at the statutory distance, and after watching him for some time longer we came away, one of us at least thoroughly satisfied as to the magnificence of the battle array of the Capercaillie.



AN LOCHAN UAINÉ, GLEN MORE.