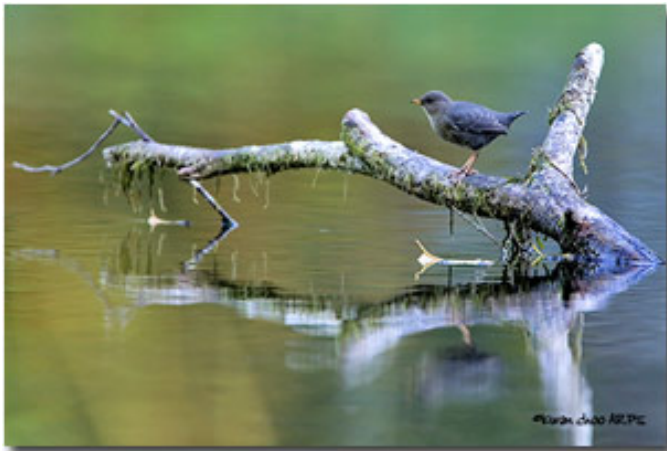


Encounter with the American Dipper

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I have come to love and be fascinated by a couple of species of birds recently, and one of them is the American Dipper. This is the only Dipper in North America - a similar bird is found in Europe, where it is better known as the Water Ouzel.

So, what's there to love about this wren-like, rather colourless bird? First of all, it has this rather unique habit of bobbing up and down when perched, hence its name. I find this action most captivating. It has the ability to swim without webbed feet - the Dipper can dive and spend a fair bit of time underwater, and in doing so manage fast moving streams quite easily, using its short-spanned wings to help motion as it forages for food. It can stand on very smooth and slimy stones in strong currents without any difficulty. Its flight is low, never seeming to be higher than a couple of feet above water, and the very quick flapping of its wings can produce high speed of flight. This bird also has a beautiful song when resting between feeds.



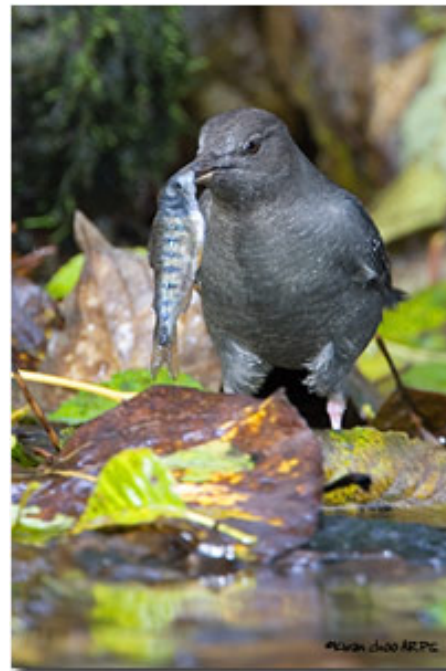
This is very typical habitat of the Dipper.



Avian books tell us that it feeds on mollusks and water larvae.



Water seems to run off its feathers without any signs of retention.



One morning in early autumn as I was setting up my tripod in the shallow water, this Dipper flew in and settled on the other side a mere 20 feet away. To my amazement, it flicked away some fallen leaves and picked out a small fish (which I can now identify as Coho Salmon fry).



They thrash the live fish in their bills on the rock or stone by the stream. This can take two to three minutes before they are convinced that the prey is truly dead.



And, finally the fish is swallowed - head first, of course.

I spent a very rewarding thirty minutes with this bird and during that time it had consumed four of these small fish. As it seemed to pick these without moving very much, I wonder if it had kept a "supply" there under the fallen leaves. I cannot be sure, but wouldn't it be amazing if indeed it had a larder of previously caught prey. I certainly was unaware that this bird feeds on small fish. But, since it lives by mountain streams, this should not be considered abnormal.

If you are lucky enough to spot one of these birds, do keep a lookout for these different types of behaviour.

Editor's note - You can view more of Kwan's photography in his [online portfolio](#).

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