

On Birds and Their Behavior

Hatsumi Sensei was quoted as saying that in order to truly understand Shinden Fudô Ryû, we must understand birds and their behavior. This paper is a collection of observations and theories on bird behavior and their possible correlation to Shinden Fudô Ryû and Ninjutsu in general. Some of the facts and notes presented may be obvious in correlation, whereas others may be less obvious. In either case I hope you find the information interesting and useful.

- Josh Sager, 10.11.98

Behavioral Similarities of Species

The Skylark, Sparrow, and Quail are all primarily ground-nesting birds.

- *Several of the kata in Shinden Fudô Ryû involve sitting (nesting) on the ground, or going to the ground as part of the technique.*

All of these birds, and including the Magpie, take off in a quick, explosive, vertical ascent.

- *The kata of Shinden Fudô Ryû that bear these birds' names all incorporate quick, vertical movements to unbalance the opponent.*
- *In the kata Unjaku, for example, the Tori drops to the ground, then quickly jumps up vertically to strike Uke in the face with fudoken.*

"In order to land as softly as possible the bird needs to be at the point of stalling when it is just above the landing place. To do this it must judge the landing position from afar and glide into it in this manner, using up all its forward motion and so greatly reducing the shock to the body that a harder landing would entail." (1)

- *Jack Hoban commented at the 1998 US Tai Kai in regards to the kata Fûbi. His interpretation at the time was the feeling of jumping onto the opponent at the apex of the jump, to eliminate force or excess weight to be placed on the opponent.*

Species-Specific Behavior

Skylark and Sparrow (Unjaku/Hibari kata)

In flight during a confrontation, Skylarks move with very small, quick movements, never staying in a repetitive motion for very long.

Regarding Sparrow - "Sometimes chases end in encounters in which both birds grapple on the ground." (2)

"So many people think that you won't use your wings in a fight. Because the birds nose and claws on their feet, three points. So you won't imagine it to use the wings. That is a form of kyojitsu you can learn from the skylarks. Learn to use all sorts of weapons. Metsubushi or whatever, against people from all directions. Try to keep this with you in training, don't just focus on one point." (3)

"One of the escape tactics on the skylark is to attempt to climb and remain above a high-flying falcon." (9)

"Sometimes birds also play dead. J. Couch in his book *Illustrations of Instinct* tells of a collector who caught a skylark in a butterfly net. When he grasped her, she felt limp and motionless as if dead. He threw the body away, and she fell to the ground like a stone. As she lay there, he pushed her body with his foot. After a short while the bird, trailing a wing, shuffled off as if her wing and legs had been broken. When she was far enough away, she took to the air in flight." (10)

Quail (Ugari kata)

Some species of Quail - "Usually escapes disturbance by running; seldom flies." (4)

Quail will hold tight and take off in a flurry of wings, like a puddle duck jumping off a lake. The first part of the flight is mostly vertical, then veering horizontally with twisting and turning in flight to elude predators. This is known to disrupt the momentum and balance of the predator bird, causing confusion.

- *In the kata Ugari, it is taught to go with the throw, then twist and turn horizontally (three-dimensional movement) to counter-throw your opponent.*

Quail will often provide distractions as a defense, to confuse a predator.

“Water birds, as everybody knows, have feet better suited to move freely through the water than to walking on land, and that movement is truly elegant. Learn this footwork of the water birds – that is what this technique Ugari tries to express.” (5)

- *Still trying to figure this correlation out.*

Magpie (Kasasagi kata)

During the nesting season, the male will protect its territory by swooping down and attacking animals or people it feels are too close to the nesting site. They are **very** aggressive towards protecting their territory.

“... Another description concerns magpie hawking in which a magpie trapped on the open prairie by a fast-flying hunting falcon reached the shelter of a barbed-wire fence post. It proceeded to circle the post, always keeping the post between itself and the falcon. The magpie would not fly even when the falconer walked up and picked it up. Needless to say the magpie was spared out of respect for its shrewd tactic.” (8)

Miscellaneous Bird Behavior Information

Color and Camouflage

“Color functions in almost every aspect of life of birds and can be considered under two categories: colors that render a bird inconspicuous – cryptic colors; and colors that make a bird extremely conspicuous. Cryptic colors provide camouflage by enabling birds to merge with their backgrounds. A good example is seen in different species of larks, which inhabit desert regions...

Cryptic coloration is often made more effective by the adoption of certain postures when predators threaten. For example, when a Bittern is alarmed, it stretches its head to the sky revealing dark markings on its neck which merge with the pattern of the reeds in which it lives...

Colors that make birds conspicuous serve a number of different functions. Brilliant colors aid the recognition of species.” (6)

“Some of the most strikingly camouflaged birds are those that nest or live on the ground such as the Woodcock and the Nightjars...

Such patterns are called disruptive coloration, since they break up the outline of the bird...

An important aspect of animal camouflage involves the elimination of shadows. The undersides of animals are often more palely marked than the upperside. This is known as counter-shading since it serves to remove, or at least reduce, the darker color that would result from the bird's own shadow on its underside...

However, birds stand above the ground on thin legs and if the light is bright, they tend to cast a conspicuous shadow on the ground, which may give away their position. For this reason many birds crouch down on the ground when danger threatens so as to eliminate this telltale shadow. The head is drawn in or stretched out along the ground in front of the crouching bird.

In all aspects of camouflage the behavior of the animal is crucial if the effects of the camouflage are not to be ruined. For example many young waders are beautifully camouflaged, but only if they crouch, If they stand up then their shadow gives them away at once...

Similarly, the Bittern only achieves its best camouflage by drawing itself upright until it matches the vertical lines of the reed-bed in which it lives."

Patterns of Attack

"How could such a small bird be so deadly? The robin attacks species much larger than itself. Its beak is very slender, almost needle-like, and the robin uses it like a stiletto, thumping away at another birds with great accuracy. The usual point of attack is the back of the head at the base of the skull. This is a very vulnerable spot in vertebrate animals, for the spinal cord can be reached where the neck vertebrae meets the skull." (11)

The Rosey Egret is primarily a fish-eating bird. When hunting for food, it will walk in the water, spreading its wings out, which creates a shadow. The fish are then unable to see the bird from above, only the shadow.

General

Most all birds, and all shore birds, will always face into the wind to be able to immediately take off and get away from danger. By facing into the wind, they are able to achieve maximum lift without having to walk or run to "take off". This is a good way to detect wind direction, as well as danger.

In Hichô No Kamae, one leg is picked up and rests on the other. For birds, one leg is commonly lifted up against the body cavity to stay warm. Birds lose most of their heat through their legs, so by keeping one leg up, the loss of heat is greatly reduced. Although heat loss does not play a factor in Hichô No Kamae, it is one possible explanation for the formation of the kamae.

References

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