Ridgway Collection

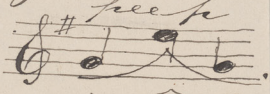
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE,
DIVISION OF BOTANY,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

Sept. 6., 1898.

Mr. Robt. Ridgway.

Dear Sir:-

Yesterday while on a picnic, I noticed a very peculiar action of birds that might probably be of interest to you.

During the picnic at the German Orphan Asylum, Anacostia, a flue was used that had been idle a long while. Nothing unusual was noticed during the entire afternoon until at approaching dusk a peculiar whirring was heard and tones that sounded like  Looking up, we saw an endless train of swallows (as they seemed to be in the dusk) approach and swoop down close over the chimney and fly on, all the while uttering their cry in an agitated manner. They passed very closely over the chimney

and some of them seemed to disappear in the chimney while none were seen to come out again. There was at that time no smoke rising from it, but the large fire burning in the range must have have given off so much CO and CO_2 as the smoke immediately such as were sufficiently daring to enter.

The train seemed endless, until it was discovered that they had formed into a circle; According to the most careful estimate there must have been from 800 to + 1000 birds.

What was their object? Was it to assist some unfortunate bird-family in the chimney or were they on a spree as bees and butterflies are said to do? In about 20 minutes they began to scatter and seek their homes.

Yours Very Respectfully
F. L. J. Boettcher.