

fisher kings

魚鷹捕魚

Man and bird combine to fish the otherworldly waters of the Li Jiang River

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For centuries, local fishermen and their cormorant partners have plied the still, otherworldly waters of the Li Jiang between what today is the city of Guilin and the age-old town of Yangshuo, roughly 80 kilometres downriver. Typically, the fishing team consists of three partners – a man and two cormorants. The birds spend most of their time perched upon their private posts at the bow and at the stern, respectively. The human stands midpoint, propelling the raft with a pole.

When fish are sensed or sighted, the avian associate takes over. Instantly forming her body into sleek diving form, the cormorant springs from the perch and in a flash is over the side into the water, shooting dart-like through the currents.

Minutes later she surfaces and leaps from the water to reassume her perch aboard the bamboo raft. While submerged, the bird may have snacked on one or two smaller fish, but it's the larger fish still bulging in her throat that will be on the human's dinner table this evening.

The partnership may seem one-sided. The avian member bears the brunt of the labours, her foot tethered, slicing the currents, sensing and capturing her prey, returning to the raft – only to be prohibited from swallowing the larger fish by the straw ring wrapped around the base of her long neck. Unless a particularly enthusiastic team player, the bird may be upended to disgorge the catch – a painless, if perhaps >

合作無間的魚鷹與捕魚人，在漓江上，不分晝夜地共同為生活奮鬥。

在廣西桂林與陽朔間80公里長的漓江水面上，幾世紀以來，捕魚人與他們的工作伙伴鸕鶿鳥，撐划著竹筏，逡巡江水下的魚。竹筏上的工作成員，多半有3位：一名漁夫與兩隻鸕鶿鳥。全身黝黑、看似粗壯的鸕鶿鳥，在這裡被稱為魚鷹，取其獵魚之鷹的意思。

通常是竹筏兩端各棲據著一隻魚鷹，漁夫立站於中間，撐著竹篙緩緩前行。當一察覺水底有魚蹤，魚鷹便接手工作，瞬時起身擺出優美的跳水姿態，一眨眼便已縱身跳入水裡。牠像鏢槍一樣急射而出，破水直向獵物進攻。幾分鐘後，魚鷹探出水面跳回牠的位置，在牠鼓脹的頸項裡，正是今晚餐桌上的大魚，至於魚鷹，牠也早已在水底飽食小魚了。

牠是套著金箍的聰明鳥

老實說，他們的工作分配還真不公平，冒著風險跳水劃破急流、追蹤獵捕魚群的魚鷹，不僅擔負工作最吃重的部分，腳上還拴綁著繩子，所以又不得不乖乖回到筏上，把吞含在頸項間的大魚如數吐出。那套在牠們長脖子底部的繩環，像是戴在孫悟空頭上的金箍，終究逃不出漁夫的如來佛掌。但這些苦工並不會換來漁夫熱情的對待，牠可能會被漁夫抓腳倒栽蔥，吐出脖子裡的大魚，雖然不至於痛苦，不過還真是威嚴盡失，頗沒面子。

有趣的是，魚鷹們對這種合作關係倒是甘之如飴。有些已經心甘情願了，根本不須要在脖子上套繩環；有些更是不得了，甚至能指揮命令漁夫，在水面上呼叫漁夫拿來竹簍，讓牠直接吐魚到簍裡，那是因為吞含的魚太大了，重得讓牠連跳上竹筏的力道都沒了。

還有報導指出，魚鷹像是有前輩傳授經驗一樣，知道可以和漁夫簽訂工作契約：第8次漁獲屬於魚鷹。特別是有專業訓練的魚鷹，都視這項無形的工作契約是雙方必須遵守的有力約定。>





undignified process. But the cormorants seem to go with the flow. Some have decidedly come to terms with the deal, no longer requiring the restrictive throat ring. And others will unhesitatingly issue a command to their human; for instance, when returning to the surface with a fish too heavy to carry aboard the raft, a bird may call out to the man to bring a net.

A fair few others, it has been reported, have been known to hold their human partner to assumed contractual obligations. For instance, as prescribed by tradition, many fishermen still allow their birds to consume the eighth fish caught. Particularly professional cormorants tend to consider this a binding provision.

Writing for the *Biological Journal of the Linnean Society*, Pamela Egremont recounts that birds having caught and turned over seven consecutive fish to their human will then “stubbornly refuse to move again until their neck ring is loosened. They ignore an order to dive and even resist a rough push or a knock, sitting glum and motionless on their perches.” Only after the ring is removed so that the next fish may be consumed whole does the bird leap overboard, Egremont explains. “One is forced to conclude that these highly intelligent birds can count up to seven.”

At the helm of one such present-day partnership is 42-year-old Liu Gang, a native of Xing Ping, a small ancient town along the banks of the Li Jiang. He describes his inherited profession with a touch of

wistfulness. “I’ve worked on this river since I was a small boy,” he says. “My father and grandfather were both fishermen, and my father taught me how to work with the birds and the best places on the river to fish. It’s not an easy life, and the river is not as deep as it was, but I’m happy.”

If the river is sustained, and Liu and his cormorants maintain their association, he, his wife and teenage son will never lack for fish. A single strong bird can sustain a small family and excess fish are sold at market. “I can make enough money doing this, and my son will often help me. Together, with four birds and two rafts, we make more.” But, he adds: “My son will not become a fisherman like me. I want him to finish his studies, go to university and get a good office job in Guilin.”

In centuries past, to draw fish closer, fishermen would extend torches over the water at night. Today they use propane lanterns, but the practical and visual effects are almost the same. And if garbed in traditional manner, with a protective shoulder shroud jutting out at a sharp angle and wide hat, the man takes on a bird-like appearance in his assumed plumage. The cormorants, too, have their adapted and very functional workwear. Unlike most water fowl, the feathers of the cormorant are not waterproof and don’t hold air while diving. This enables the birds to shoot more quickly to the bottom of the river, where the big fish linger. ➤

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「 你不得不承認這些魚鷹智商很高，是能由1數到7的聰明鳥。 」



在國際上深具權威、已有百餘年歷史的倫敦林奈學會，其所出版的生物學報裡，學者潘蜜拉伊格洛蒙特發表了一篇魚鷹觀察，她發現魚鷹在連續7次入水捕魚、交出漁獲後，就會頑固不動等著漁夫拿掉脖子上的繩環。即使漁夫命令牠們下水，用推的或敲頭的也沒用，牠們只會像個雕像也不動，悶悶不樂地棲坐在位置上。「只有當脖子上的套環拿開後，魚鷹才會起身跳出竹筏，開始捕魚進食，」伊格洛蒙特解釋說：「你不得不承認，這些魚鷹的智商很高，是能由1數到7的聰明鳥。」

牠撐持一個家庭的開銷

42歲的劉剛，在興坪土生土長，從小帶著魚鷹乘筏捕魚。這個位於漓江畔的小漁村，村民們自古就養魚鷹抓魚，劉剛繼承了父親的討生絕活，倒也有一番領悟：「我從小在這條江上翻滾，父親是魚鷹捕魚人，祖父也是。我父親傳授了不少控制魚鷹的絕竅，還有哪裡魚最多。這門生計一點也不輕鬆，而且水深已大不如昔，漁獲減少很多，不過，我很快樂。」

如果漓江還是舊日的漓江，那劉剛和魚鷹的工作關係就能一直維持下去，他的妻子和十來歲的兒子，也永遠不怕沒魚可吃。這隻宛如長工的魚鷹，撐起的是一個家庭的生計。「兒子常來幫忙，捕魚賺的錢是夠用了，現在家裡有兩艘木筏，養了4隻魚鷹，兩個人一起賺更多，但是，」他說：「以後他不可以跟著打魚，得讀書上大學，畢業後在桂林找個好工作。」

以前為了誘引魚群，夜間漁夫們將竹筏一字排開，筏上點的火把也在江上延展開來，水上火光靛靛，煞是好看。現在用的是汽燈，照明或誘魚的效果，和火把相差無幾，但對生態的影響卻不小。

如果以傳統方式誘魚，日間漁夫們還得戴上斗大的帽子，夜間則須披著似鳥的削肩衣罩，意圖偽裝成一隻鳥。不過我們可以更實際地推估這些裝束的作用：寬帽是為了遮蔽日曬，似鳥翅的披肩，則是為了擋避火把噴出的火星。 ➤



Dressed in traditional manner, the fishermen take on a bird-like appearance (above and far left)
上圖及左頁上圖：漁夫們以傳統的裝束，打扮成一隻鳥來捕魚。



In return for their good work, most birds are cared for and treated with a measure of respect. Besides fish, they are treated to other bits of cooked and raw land meats. Some become, in essence, family members, with names bestowed in accordance with their particular characteristics and attributes.

Cormorants can live as long as 20 to 25 years. The senior work birds, slowing down and deemed to have fulfilled their contract, are permitted to retire. Their neck rings are removed a final time and thereafter they may ride on the raft and fish for themselves.

The stretch of the Li south of Guilin has changed much since Liu's father fished these waters. China's economic development has brought tour groups, cruise boats and environmental risk, but Liu has no plans to retire anytime soon. "I like my life as a fisherman. It's hard work and I don't make much money, but I'm a lot freer than most people. The river is still very beautiful and I like being here every day." He pauses, then adds: "Of course, I wish things were more like they were when my father was fishing ... I'm not sure how much longer there'll be people like me on these waters. If the river is protected, maybe a long time." ❏

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「我喜歡捕魚，雖然工作並不輕鬆，但我比多數人自由。」

牠看著捕魚產業的興衰

魚鷹擁有非常實用的工作裝束，牠的羽毛不像一般鳥類具有阻水性，潛入水中時也無法含藏一層空氣，這讓魚鷹不得不快速完成水中的工作，迅速獵捕水底的大魚，一刻也不多留，工作效率非常高。

對於辛勤工作的魚鷹，漁夫們回報的是妥善的照顧與一定的尊敬，獎勵品除了魚之外，有時也會給予新鮮的熟肉。魚鷹實質上無異於家裡的一份子，就如同兄弟姊妹般，也會有個名字，漁家們取名除了根據魚鷹的特徵，也會以牠的貢獻來命名。

魚鷹的壽命一般在20到25歲之間，年老的魚鷹行動遲緩，被認定已完成工作契約，可告老退休、卸除脖子上的套環，自此便為自己而活了，牠可隨興跟著乘筏上工，想抓多少魚就抓多少。

桂林一帶的漓江南岸，在劉剛父親捕魚的那個年代，便已經開始改變了。中國經濟的快速發展，帶來成群的旅遊團、觀光遊船，以及無法避免的生態環境污染。但劉剛並沒有打算退休，「我喜歡捕魚，雖然工作並不輕鬆，也討不了多少錢，但我還是比大多數人自由多了。漓江還是很漂亮，能夠每天都待在這兒，就覺得很幸福了...」他停頓了一下，再接著說：「當然，我也希望一切都還能跟父親在世時一樣...，我不知道以後還能有多少像我這樣的捕魚人出現在漓江上，但是如果人們能多保護這條江，或許捕魚人的身影還能在江上存活得久一點吧。」 ❏