A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CALLING FOR RAIN

One of the curiosities of weather folklore is the widespread belief that birds of various species "call for rain," often associated with the belief that rain is likely to occur when thus called. The familiar note of the American robin, for example, is interpreted to mean: "Bring out your skillet, bring out your skillet, the rain will fill it." This association with the robin is very general in the United States and Canada. In some parts of New England the call is described as "singing for rain."

The North American quail or bob-white is also said to "call for rain," and its cry is interpreted to be "More wet, more wet." The call of the loon is given the same meaning in localities as widely separated as Cape Breton, Florida and the state of Washington. The yellow-billed cuckoo is known as the "rain crow" because its noisy cries are popularly considered a sign of rain. Both in America and elsewhere the guinea-fowl's cry of "Come back, come back" is thought to invoke rain. An English proverb says:

"When the peacock loudly bawls
Soon we'll have both rain and squalls."

Shakespeare records a similar belief about the parrot:

"Clamorous as a parrot against rain."

In Hampshire, England, the missel-thrush is called the "storm-cock" because it is said to sing particularly loud and long before rain.

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