

Branta canadensis.—At Prince Edward Island on September 6, 7, and 8, 1892, Canada Geese gathered at Hogg Island flats, at the mouth of Richmond Bay, to a greater extent than has ever been known before at this season of the year, estimates of the number being impossible. On September 9 they rose up in the air, and remained in sight some thirty minutes. As watched from a distance of about two miles they had the appearance of a large thunder cloud over a mile in length. Mr. William Everett of Dorchester, Mass., who visits Prince Edward Island every season has kindly furnished me with the above information.

Mr. H. G. Nutter of Boston informs me that he saw at Ponkapog Pond, Mass., Oct. 17, 1892, four flocks of Canada Geese flying southwest. One flock contained seven birds; one, eleven; one, thirty-two; and the other, forty to fifty.—GEORGE H. MACKAY, *Nantucket, Mass.*

Branta bernicla at Nantucket, Massachusetts.—I am informed by Mr. Charles E. Snow that on Nov. 22, 1892, while shooting at the extreme western end of Nantucket, he saw large numbers of Brant (*Branta bernicla*) flying towards the southwest. They passed mostly through the 'opening' between the islands of Nantucket and Tuckernuck. Some of the flocks contained from one to two hundred birds. He also noted several hundred American Eider Ducks (*Somateria dresseri*) well up in the air flying in the same direction. The wind was north-northwest and northwest.—GEORGE H. MACKAY, *Nantucket, Mass.*

Notes on the American Bittern.—Late last September a female *Botaurus lentiginosus* was discovered by some boys upon the margin of a small pond at a short distance behind my residence. It was a most unusual locality for the species to occur, and its coming there appeared to have been due to the fact that the bird was exhausted by long flight. After flying a few yards it was easily captured, and was brought to me alive, without having received any bodily harm whatever. Next morning it had recovered no little of its strength, and it was remarkable to observe how noiselessly and with what ease it could fly about a furnished room without overturning any small object of furniture. It gracefully flew up from the floor and perched upon the curtain rod of a high window, where it sat for an hour or more in a characteristic position, as motionless as a statue. If approached when upon the ground, it eyed you keenly, assumed a squatting posture, widely spread out the feathers at either side of the neck, while it slightly raised those of the rest of the body and its wings; and finally, when it considered you within the proper distance, drew all its plumage close to its body and delivered, as quick as a flash, a darting blow with its beak. This thrust, I am sure, is generally given with sufficient violence to pierce one nearly through an eye, even were the lid instinctively drawn down to protect that organ. By such a blow it can easily stab a large frog through and through its head, impaling the creature upon the end of its beak,—a feat I have seen the bird perform. A loud blowing noise accompanies this attack of the Bittern, which varies in its intensity,

—depending apparently much upon the degree of anger to which the bird has been excited by its tormentors. My captive behaved much in the same way when held up by the legs in front of another person, and one had to exercise great care to avoid its quick and well-delivered thrusts. At the end of three or four days, it having eaten nothing up to that time, nor drunk any water, I offered it a live medium-sized frog to try its appetite. It promptly laid out that poor batrachian by a few telling stabs given with its beak, sending one home every time the animal moved a limb. Immediately after killing it, it was picked up with the bill, and throwing back its head the bird attempted to swallow the morsel. In this it failed after several trials, and finally abandoned it for good and all. This Bittern lived twelve days without ever having eaten a single thing or swallowed a drop of water. It passed several thin, cream-colored evacuations from the bowels every twenty-four hours, and died, apparently without any pain, in a squatting position, absolutely unruffled in plumage, on the evening of the twelfth day—a plucky fowl to the instant of its death.

There is one very interesting point to observe here, and it is the fact that the lower the position a bird occupies in the system the greater the length of time it seems to be enabled to go without partaking of any nutriment whatever. Gannets and Cormorants will live nearly a month without either eating or drinking anything, while on the other hand any of the small Passeres will succumb in a few days to such treatment. In this connection it is important to note that many lizards will live several months without consuming a morsel of food or a drop of water. This may be another particular in which the lower birds approach their reptilian kin.

While dissecting this Bittern with the view of saving its skeleton, and observing what else I could in its anatomy, I found that it possessed a peculiar arrangement and modification of the vertebræ and certain muscles in the upper third of the neck, much as we find it in *Plotus ankinga*, and in a less marked degree in Cormorants, the Gannets, and Pelicans. This modification, which is associated with the power of the birds mentioned (especially the Darters and Bitterns) of giving a quick thrust with the beak, has been well described by Garrod, a paper among his 'Collected Scientific Memoirs,' and by Donitz, and is well worthy of close study and comparison. Garrod does not mention having observed it in *Botaurus* and its allies.—R. W. SHUFELDT, *Takoma, D. C.*

Tringa alpina on Long Island, New York.—On Sept. 15, 1892, I secured a European Dunlin at Shinnecock Bay. During a week's trip I secured only one *T. a. pacifica*. The specimen was identified through the kindness of Mr. F. M. Chapman of the American Museum of Natural History. Coues says of this species, "A straggler to Greenland"; Ridgway, "Accidental or casual in eastern North America (west side of Hudson Bay)." Its occurrence in the United States has heretofore seemed doubtful.—CURTIS CLAY YOUNG, *Brooklyn, N. Y.*