

THE EARLY HISTORY OF A DUCK HAWK.

BY VIOLA F. RICHARDS.

Plates XII-XIII.

How long since Sugar Loaf Mountain, a State Reservation in the town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, became a nesting place for the *Falco peregrinus anatum*, or Duck Hawk, no one knows, but records show that it was more than one hundred years ago. Year after year they have laid their eggs, and reared their young in practically inaccessible places among the ledges on the eastern side of the mountain.

In the spring of 1917, Charles L. Fisher, an enthusiastic bird student who lives at the foot of Sugar Loaf, discovered that the Duck Hawks had chosen for a nesting place, a ledge to which access was surprisingly easy. On the open ledge, with no pretense of a nest, were laid three eggs, cream colored, with an encircling band of chocolate colored spots. Lighter spots covered the large end of each egg, but the small end was clear. These eggs were the size of, and similar in shape to, a Leghorn pullet's egg. At the time of discovery two of these eggs were cracked, ready to hatch. That night two of them disappeared. The remaining egg hatched next day, which was May 5, 1917.

Instead of being bare and unlovely, like many baby birds, this little bird resembled a bunch of cotton, with two bright, black eyes. Within a few days, a faint, grayish hue took the place of the clear white. May 18 the nestling was photographed for the first time. An excellent idea of the nesting place is gathered from this picture.

A second photograph, taken May 21, shows the bird at close range. At this time it did not show much fear of intruders.

May 30, when a photographer visited the ledge, the young bird was still clad in a coat of fluffy down. During this visit the anxious parent birds soared overhead, occasionally coming so near that the whistle made by their wings cutting the air made a chill creep along the spine of the photographer. That their shrill screams were warnings which the young bird understood, was evident, for it crouched as flat as it could on the rock, with head down, and kept as nearly motionless as possible. But its heart beat wildly,

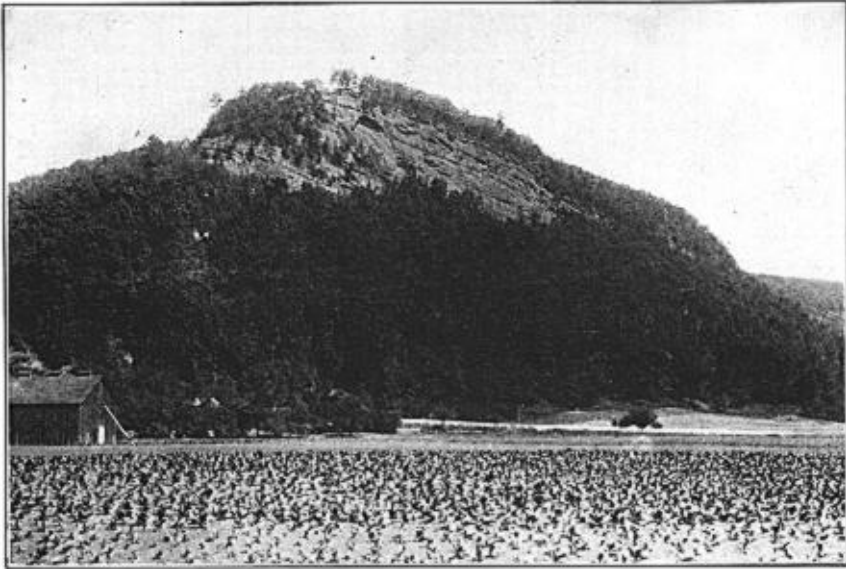


Photo. by V. F. Richards

1. SUGAR LOAF MOUNTAIN, DEERFIELD, MASS. SHOWING LEDGE WHERE
DUCK HAWKS NESTED
2. YOUNG DUCK HAWK ON NESTING LEDGE, MAY 30, 1917

and its beady black eyes watched every move made by the visitor.

Early in June, dark feathers began to take the place of the down, and for a time the bird was decidedly ragged in appearance. His naturally fierce disposition became noticeable, and he showed increasing resentment when visitors appeared.

About this time State Ornithologist E. H. Forbush came to take pictures of the now famous baby Duck Hawk. Earlier in its career, Mr. H. K. Job had succeeded in obtaining some very fine films of it for moving pictures. At that time it had been quite docile, and would stay where it was placed very satisfactorily. Now, however, it was more active, so Mr. Forbush, aided by Mr. Fisher, attached an inconspicuous little harness to its leg, and hobbled thus, it became an unwilling but quiet subject for the photographer. So ferocious had the bird become, it was necessary to handle it — literally — with gloves on.

Wishing to get a picture of the rapidly maturing bird as late as possible before it left the nest, Mr. Fisher closely watched its development. When he judged that the bird was ready for flight, he made a last exposure with the wonderfully fine result shown here. Within a half minute after this was taken the bird flew from the ledge. Just how long it remained in the vicinity is not known; but a few days later it alighted on a branch of a tree over the ledge upon which Mr. Fisher stood, and fearlessly watched while an experimental attempt to frighten it away, was made.

If anyone ever takes a Duck Hawk which carries upon one leg the leg-band of a hen, he may be reasonably sure it is the bird about which this article is written.

A careful record was kept of the remains of such birds as were used for food by these Duck Hawks, and a list is given below.

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| Blue Jays (many) | Mourning Doves |
| Kingbirds | Phœbes |
| Nuthatches | Different Warblers |
| Chickens | Veeries |
| Grosbeaks | Woodpeckers |
| Scarlet Tanagers | Homing Pigeon |
| Flickers | |

May 30, on the leg-band of a Homing Pigeon, the remains of which were found on the ledge, was this inscription: A-U² J 5733 (the A and U joined together).



Photo. by Chas. L. Fisher

1. YOUNG DUCK HAWK, MAY 21, 1917
2. YOUNG DUCK HAWK, JUNE 16, 1917