

PHOTOGRAPHING WILD TURKEY NESTS IN PENNSYLVANIA.

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Plate XVIII.

DURING the spring of 1928, while studying the white-tailed deer population problem in the mountains of Pennsylvania I had the good fortune to be able to examine and photograph two nests of the Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*), a species which, in its present somewhat hybrid form, is holding its own fairly well in the wilder mountains of the Commonwealth in spite of being hunted extensively nearly every fall.

One of these nests was on State Game Refuge No. 2, not far from Clearfield, Clearfield County. This nest was situated more or less in the open, and at no great distance from the steep mountain road which winds up the slope to the refuge keeper's house. When we first visited the nest the female slipped off quietly and ran away through the laurel and scrub oaks. She did not fly, and her departure was virtually noiseless. I waited near this nest, in a concealed spot, for over an hour, and had the pleasure of seeing the trim, long-legged creature slip back furtively to her eggs. I did not secure photographs of the bird as she settled upon the nest but I saw her coming through the woods at some distance, and made one or two exposures which present to the eye only a tangle of vines and bushes.

The nest held eight fresh eggs on May 5; the set was, no doubt, incomplete. (See Plate XVIII.) It was not sheltered from directly above, so the eggs were visible at some distance; but when the female was on the nest it was virtually impossible to see her, so perfectly did her colors harmonize with her surroundings.

On June 6, on a rocky mountainside about twelve miles from Lock Haven, Clinton County, I examined a nest which held seventeen well incubated eggs. On the day before there had been eighteen eggs; it is thought that a skunk or fox had disturbed the nest, though the female bird evidently had been sitting closely most of the time. This nest was built among small, angular



UPPER.—WILD TURKEY HEN ON NEST.
LOWER.—NEST AND EGGS.

rocks, and, while not very well hidden from above, it was screened on all sides by thick laurel, which made photography difficult. The female bird was either very unsuspecting or remarkably brave, for she did not leave her nest while we were near. Her broad back, with its squamate pattern and dull greenish lights, was difficult to discern among the foliage and the intricate interlacing of shadows. When first seen her neck was stretched out at full length in front of her, and her plumage was spread and flattened out noticeably. When she realized she was being observed she drew her head back and moved it slowly about in a snakelike manner, while she gave forth strange hissing and grunting sounds. When she had become accustomed to us she again stretched her neck out in front of her. Occasionally, when disturbed, she gave a characteristic *quit, quit*.

Near this nest had been found, a short time before, two other Wild Turkey nests, both with large sets of eggs. The incubating female of one of these nests had been killed on the nest and eaten nearby. A trap set immediately near the broken eggs held, on the following morning, a female Gray Fox, which a day later, while in captivity, gave birth to two cubs. The other nest was deserted after a Skunk had eaten most of the eggs.

The average Wild Turkey taken nowadays in Pennsylvania has the rich colors, chestnut-tipped tail, and red legs of the form which originally occurred in this region. Nevertheless birds with white-tipped tails are not infrequently taken, and many specimens whose primaries are partly black and white barred, and partly solid slaty black, have been examined. Upon investigating the history of the State Game Commission's restocking of this species, I find that but very few birds have been brought into Pennsylvania for restocking *directly* from other regions.¹ Most of the birds were purchased from breeders living in Pennsylvania and care was used in selecting the wildest possible stock from the birds on hand. The source of the stock held by these Pennsylvania breeders is largely a matter of conjecture: some birds had been purchased from Vermont, and the status of the Vermont stock was, at the time of purchasing, unknown; others were probably from Virginia and

¹ See *The Turkey in Pennsylvania*, 'The Cardinal,' II, No. 5, January, 1929, p. 109.

Maryland. A total of 1,985 Turkeys have been liberated by the Commission since this work began in 1913; by far the greater part of these were actually Pennsylvania stock or birds which had interbred considerably with native Pennsylvania stock.

Most of the hybrid characters now found in our birds, therefore, have resulted not from the introduction of stock by the Game Commission, but from the inevitable mingling of the wild birds with domestic stock on the farms. The domestic bird's roving instinct takes it to the forests; its call-notes summon the wild mate which sometimes actually comes to the farmyard, and thus has our race been merged with stock whose original habitat was probably Mexico.

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