

to March 26, 1910, in Scarborough, Maine (Norton, Auk, 28: 255, 1911). These are both in the Brock collection, now in the museum of the Portland Society of Natural History.—ARTHUR H. NORTON, *Portland Society of Natural History, Portland, Maine.*

Yellow-billed Tropic-bird in Maine.—A few days after the destructive hurricane of September 21, 1938, a specimen of *Phaethon lepturus catesbyi* was found at East Winn, Penobscot County, Maine, about seventy miles inland. This specimen, which has been acquired by the Portland Society of Natural History through the estate of the late Walter J. Clayton, is an adult bird (sex unnoted), apparently in good health, though molt of its flight feathers was in progress. Counting from without, primaries 9 and 7 in the right wing are less than four inches long, while in the left wing, primaries 10 and 8 are about four inches long, and the third primary is about a fourth of the full length of that feather. It would seem that loss of these feathers had reduced the bird's powers of flight on that critical occasion, causing it to be driven before the gale to its doom.

This appears to be the first instance in which this bird has been noted in Maine.—ARTHUR H. NORTON, *Portland Society of Natural History, Portland, Maine.*

A method of remaking old bird skins.—Probably few of us who began making bird skins thirty or forty years ago, have what may be referred to as an artistically flawless collection. Certainly my own was liberally sprinkled with eyesores—the harvest of early, misguided efforts. So far as remembered now in respect to study skins, not a single pamphlet or book on taxidermy possessed in those days, stressed the prime necessity for using body-length neck sticks which fitted firmly into either the throat or the brain cavity. As a result of this, scores of my youthful specimens, with only a cotton filling, eventually developed broken necks, or the heads became twisted about and permanently set at violent angles. The bodies, too, through lack of support, often became distorted into unsightly caricatures. Another early and frequent fault was over-stuffing of the breast; this in conjunction with a lean neck imparted a grotesque appearance that unfailingly jarred upon one's sensibilities at every contact.

At long last I determined, to the best of my ability, to remake these offending skins so that they would more nearly conform to the superior product of today. Considerable experimentation was carried out at various times involving specimens ranging from warblers to the larger waders, etc. At first the faulty skins were immersed in water for relaxation and dried in warm sawdust; this orthodox method was certainly effective enough in softening the skins, but as anyone knows who has tried it, an excessive amount of time and labor is exacted for drying and fluffing the feathers. The following much simpler method was finally developed. It is to be understood that only smaller skins up to about medium-sized hawks have been so manipulated.

The first step is to sever the abdominal stitches with surgeon's scissors. By very careful use of the forceps all, or most, of the cotton filling can be removed without tearing the dry but somewhat flexible skin. With a long-nozzled syringe a small quantity of warm water is injected into the neck and skull through the ventral opening. Next, the body skin is gently swabbed inside with wet cotton and a quantity of this moist material placed there to carry on the work of relaxation. If the feathers are held out of the way with the left hand while this is being done they remain dry about the incision. It will be noted, in fact, that the feathers

do not come into contact with water anywhere and if discretion is used in applying moisture to the inside of the skin, they remain this way throughout the course of restoration. This preparation requires only three or four minutes. The skin is now laid away in a closed tin box where it will become soft and pliable in a few hours. It is a good plan to treat a number in this way the evening before the day on which they are to be made up.

After relaxing all night, the specimens are in ideal condition for a fresh start. All the wet cotton filling is now removed and the inside of the skin lightly dusted with arsenic and borax through the distended opening. This is merely an extra precaution to insure perfect preservation. It should always be done with specimens whose previous treatment is not known with certainty. (As a matter of interest it may be mentioned that arsenic was applied to all my specimens in the past and not a single one in over thirty years has been lost through the ravages of injurious insects. This is all the more notable because of the fact that for many years, while I was absent on Arctic expeditions, these specimens were packed in wooden boxes which were not insect-proof.) The process from now on is simply the best present-day one of making up a bird skin. To begin with, this means that a stick approximately equal to the length of the original neck and body of the bird is firmly wound with cotton to the proper size. The anterior end of this supporting stick is pointed and inserted in the beak and the latter tied shut. A few wisps of cotton will be needed here and there in the neck and body to shape them suitably. The abdominal cut is now closed with needle and thread for its entire length, and rents may be sewn up with a few stitches from the outside. At this juncture, or earlier, any grease which may have exuded on the belly feathers of water birds should be wiped away with carbon tetrachloride and thus made fresh and clean; this small area is then readily dried in fine sawdust and plaster. From here on, the mode of shaping and wrapping in a thin sheet of cotton is precisely the same as for a fresh specimen. In the final laying out, many specimens are brought into better alignment by pinning on a board at beak and feet; the tail is also spread at this time.

Greatly favoring this method is its extreme simplicity and the ease with which the skins can be remade. As noted, the feathers remain dry throughout the treatment, so that no tedious drumming is required and one proceeds directly to the making of the specimen without any preliminaries whatever. At no time is the skin turned inside out. By this system the wings are not relaxed, but this seldom gives any trouble if they were originally set more or less correctly to the body and they now readily fall back into place again. In some instances they are somewhat springy with a tendency to lateral bulge, but this is easily overcome with an invisible stitch through the body over a couple of primary feathers on either side, near the bend of the wing; the flanking feathers naturally come down and cover the edge of the latter with a little persuasion from the forceps. There is really very little reshaping to be done, as, initially, most of the bad outline and structure was confined to the breast and neck. Specimens dry strong and ready for the cabinet in three or four days.

In the long-necked waders I prefer a stiff wire instead of a stick in the body and neck. The wire is sharpened at one end and pushed through the skull and skin at the forehead; the beak may be arranged straight in line with the body, or the neck slightly curved and the head turned flat on its side with the bill at an angle of 25 or 30 degrees. When the specimen is set, the wire is snipped off

out of sight below the feathers. Long beaks (godwit, curlew, avocet, etc.), which have a tendency to remain open along the terminal half, can be cemented together with adhesive and temporarily tied shut at two or three points until the substance hardens; as the surplus is removed, the cement does not show and makes a firm, neat job.

By the above procedure (following relaxation) a couple of dozen small birds can be completely restored in the course of three or four odd hours over a week end; winter is naturally the best time for such renovations. The work is pleasant with little fuss and specimens can be remade much more rapidly than when originally preserved. In most cases specimens so treated come out clean, strong and beautifully symmetrical and scarcely to be distinguished from the finest, comparable material in the collection. In the nature of things, not every specimen can be made perfect; however, if care is used, it is impossible to restore a poor skin without at least achieving radical corrections. Thus, in nine cases out of ten, old, disreputable skins can be improved beyond recognition and thus become not only a pleasure to possess and handle, but also of increased value for comparative purposes.—J. DEWEY SOPER, *Winnipeg, Manitoba*.

A correction.—In an article entitled "Food of Some Uncommon Birds" by Clarence Cottam and Phoebe Knappen [Auk, 56 (2): 138-169, April, 1939], reference is made on page 147 to a specimen of European Widgeon collected at Monroe, Michigan, by 'W. B. Tyrell' on April 3, 1927.

Mr. W. B. Tyrell informs us that this is an error, that the bird was not a European but an American Widgeon. The error was made by a member of the Biological Survey staff in accessioning the stomach. Because of the relatively few published records of the European Widgeon, it has seemed advisable to publish this correction.—CLARENCE COTTAM, *Fish and Wildlife Service, Chicago, Illinois*.