

SUMMER BIRDS OF A PRAIRIE LAKE

By G. WILLETT

IN 1903, while spending the summer in the prairie country of northeastern Montana, I observed with a great deal of interest the breeding of the many species of water birds which make this region their summer home. Upon being told of the colonies of birds breeding at Lake Bowdoin, which is fourteen miles east of Malta on the Great Northern Railroad, I determined to lose no time in making an investigation.

On the afternoon of June 19, I alighted from the train at Bowdoin section house and found myself on the bank of the lake, which was about three miles in diameter and nearly circular, bordered by grass and tules and containing several small islands. After ascertaining that there was no boat to be had, I started on foot to explore the grassy swamp bordering the open water.

The first signs of nests that I found were some hollows on a piece of high ground which had evidently been inundated by the late rains and their contents washed away. From some egg shells found in the grass near by and the presence of two or three Wilson Phalaropes I decided that the nests were those of this species.

Upon wading a short distance into the marsh I flushed an American Bittern and found one fresh egg of this species in what was apparently an old nest of the Mud-hen. A little further on I flushed a duck from a bunch of tules and, being determined to make no mistakes in identification, I brought her down with a load of number sixes. She proved to be a female Canvas-back (*Aythya vallisneria*) and the nest contained nine slightly incubated eggs. This nest was built over shallow water like that of the Red-head, but afterwards I also found this species nesting on dry ground like the Mallard. After walking some distance farther and passing numerous nests of the Mud-hen I dropped a female Spoon-bill (*Spatula clypeata*) as she left her nest of down which was partly under a pile of driftwood on a dry hummock. This also contained nine eggs of nearly the same shade as the Canvas-back's but of course much smaller.

I then spent some time trying to locate the nest of a Short-eared Owl which flew up from the grass ahead of me, but in this I was unsuccessful. As it was getting dusk by this time I left for home resolving to return at an early date.

Returning on June 28, I made directly for the point of shore that was nearest the small islands previously mentioned. I took off my clothes and carrying them above my head succeeded in wading to the first and largest island which was about 150 yards out. I was met half way by a swarm of Common Terns and Avocets. As I stepped ashore the ducks started to rise from the grass all around me and I found myself in the midst of four or five acres of eggs. The bare spots between the grass patches were occupied by the Terns and Avocets, and I also found two nests of the Spotted Sandpiper, each containing four eggs.

Every bunch of grass held a duck's nest with from six to twenty-four eggs. There were Mallards, Canvas-backs, Spoonbills, Blue- and Green-winged Teal in abundance; also a few Baldpates. Many nests contained eggs of two or more varieties, so they must have occasionally become mixed in their house numbers. The nests were all finely lined with down and in most cases were well hidden in the long grass. I also found a nest of the year before containing two addled eggs of the Canada Goose, but none were breeding here at this time.

About three-fourths of a mile farther out was another island around which I

could see many birds flying, but as a heavy wind had roughened the water considerably I decided to let that go until the next trip, and after packing a set or two of each variety I had found, I wound my way homeward.

Early on the morning of July 4, I was on the spot firmly resolved to reach that second island. I found the island no nearer than before but the water was as smooth as glass and, arming myself with a ten-pound wooden pickle bucket to bring back the spoils, I started out. After a half-hour's swimming I reached the goal and found it well worth the trouble. Altho I found no rarities here, the scene could not fail to interest any lover of ornithology. This island was smaller than the other, containing only about two acres. The beach was occupied by a colony of Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), most of their shallow nests containing two or three young birds. I secured a few sets, however, which I was able to save. In one corner of the island was a small colony of White Pelicans, the nests containing two eggs each, mostly fresh. I found one lonely, half-grown nestling and, without exception, it was the ugliest thing I ever saw.

A few ducks were breeding here also, but the greater part of the island was taken up by a rookery of Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*). There were hundreds of their nests flat on the ground among the bushes, built to a height of two or three feet. At this date most of them contained nearly full grown young, and very pugnacious they were, too. They clearly considered me an intruder and their reception of me was not conducive to much familiarity on my part.

Having thoroly explored the island and finding nothing further of interest I filled my wooden bucket with donations from the Pelicans and Gulls and made the return trip without trouble, tho my cargo made my progress rather slow.

This was my last visit to the lake that year but I expect some time to return and hope to find no diminution of the numbers of this interesting colony.

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MEASURING A CONDOR

By M. FRENCH GILMAN

IN the spring of 1901, while stationed as Forest Ranger at Warner's Ranch, San Diego County, I assisted in measuring a live California Condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*). A cattle man shot it on Volcan Mountain, breaking one wing, and after a fight succeeded in getting it home. Here it was confined in a large roomy coop and its shattered wing carefully dressed and put in a sling. The bird, however, insisted on tearing open the bandages and picking at the wound. The lady of the house had named it Polly, tho it was a fine male, and was trying to make a pet of it without getting in reach of its powerful beak. For food they occasionally gave it a beef liver or a jack rabbit.

My friend, Nathan Hargrave of Banning, was with me and we persuaded the owner to turn it loose in the enclosed yard so we could see it in action. A noble bird it appeared when released, except for the one wounded wing. The size of its feet seemed remarkable, tho not as dangerous looking as the talons of an eagle, simply big and honest-looking foundations.

The bird strode about the yard and entered the open door of a shed. Here stretched on a bed lay the mail carrier enjoying a Sunday nap. The vulture hopped upon the bed and of course the man woke up. He was startled by this