

scattered considerably at the time this is written (February 10, 1916) there are still a good many to be seen about vacant lots and parks in the heart of the town (figs. 21, 22).

The accompanying photographs are offered not for their worth as specimens of the art of photography, because a long series of cloudy and dull days interfered sadly with the taking of scenes that needed bright lighting to get good effects in motion, to say nothing of many mishaps that occurred, but with the hope that readers of THE CONDOR will be interested in illustrations of so rapidly achieved semi-domestication of wild birds in such an unexpected and unpremeditated manner.

San Francisco, February 10, 1916.

CHARACTERISTIC BIRDS OF THE DAKOTA PRAIRIES

IV. ON THE LAKES

By FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

FROM THE LARGER LAKES that I visited casually during the summer I brought tantalizing, confused memories of small flocks of Ducks shifting back and forth across the passes, Grebes calling across the water, Terns flying hither and thither, Black-crowned Night Herons posing before tule walls, families of Ducks trailing along the tule and cane-bordered shores, and numerous unnamable dots scattered over the surface, in one place one moment, rising and settling in another the next—tantalizing confused memories that rise compellingly again and again and make the call of North Dakota well nigh too strong to resist.

From the one short strip of open shore on Stump Lake that I was able to patrol for a few weeks, however, I brought a few pictures good to review. Foremost among them stands my first adult male Canvasback; let those to whom they are an old story recall the thrill of their first! There he sat on the water in strong sunlight, his aristocratic bill with its straight Grecian line from forehead to tip showing strikingly, his red head glowing, his white canvas back gleaming in the light. The strip of lakeshore, bare and uninteresting before, was distinguished by the sight. It could never be commonplace again. A Canvasback had been there! The solitary aristocrat appeared in the same place once more, to my great delight, so brilliant in the sun that the sight was positively thrilling.

Sometimes the friends that visited my shore line were just a pair of plain every day brownish Gadwalls, but it was none the less a pleasure to watch them and listen to their talk as they fed close in shore and then walked up on the beach together to rest, visiting with low friendly quacks. They might easily have been my friends of the pasture slough, Darby and Joan, as the lake was within easy flying distance.

A Blue-winged Teal was caught resting at the water line one day, but when approached flew swiftly away. A female Golden-eye, doubtless brooding inside some goodly hollow tree bordering the lake was watched swimming in from a distance when she was only a large white spot fronting the angle of a wake until, as she fed along the beach, her bright golden eye showed

plainly in her puffy brown head. As she swam slowly up and down the shore feeding, she passed two Killdeer walking on the beach. In feeding under water she would dive and re-appear, throwing up her head to swallow. When she swam away, two white spots, one each side the tail, stood out like signal lanterns on the back of a car. She is surely a well marked bird. When the farmer pointed out hollow trees where these "Wood Ducks", as they are called locally, had nested in former years, his sister told of having seen the parents fly down from their knot-holes with young on their backs. Another observer added that the young steady themselves by taking hold of their mother's feathers with their bills.

Another Duck that nested in the region, one of the Scaups, was seen on the lake at different times but never near enough to determine the species. A group of three, two of the handsome black-fronted drakes and one of the brown ducks, were seen swimming around close together the 21st of June in what seemed to be courtship rivalry, late though it was. After swimming along peacefully together for a few moments, one of the drakes would suddenly start after the other and dog his steps, swimming at his heels around and around as if trying to drive him off. The duck, meanwhile, holding her brown head high, apparently kept as far as possible from one of the rivals, though it was hard to tell which, the three swam within such a small circle. This droll performance was repeated a week later; but this time when two drakes and one duck were swimming around together a third drake happened along and seeing the group swam in rapidly as if to present his suit to the haughty lady. In any case, one suitor, presumably he, swam close to her ear. As before she held her disdainful head high and soon there were but two suitors, and at last but one. Down the lake could be seen five or six other Scaups, so let us hope that all the rivals were happily mated at last.

Another hint of anserine rivalry was given by two of the large black White-winged Scoters, those interesting Sea Ducks of the far north, here reaching the southern limit of their breeding range. It was the merest hint, but as I watched, two of the red-billed drakes suddenly stood up on the lake and raising their wings till the white patches showed, dashed through the water at each other so furiously that I stood breathless, prepared for what might come. Around they turned and—one swam off to a female spectator on the right and one to a female spectator on the left—and that was apparently the conclusion of the whole matter!

This occurred on the 28th of June, but the Scoters are said to be late breeders. Previous to this exhibition of rivalry during the two weeks that I had been watching them the Scoters seen on the lake had almost invariably been in pairs, a black and a brown one, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, often widely separated but in sight from one short strip of beach. A party of eight were found together in a bay one day making sociable duck-like noises, but on discovering me they separated out into pairs again. If that were previous to their breeding season did it indicate that they remain paired throughout the year?

Phlegmatic, inadequately describes these great Sea Ducks. Decoys they might well be, you think aggrievedly as you watch them. Surely such rare visitors might do something to at least hold the attention! After sitting like chunks of wood for a long time one of the males might perhaps turn to lie on its side and plume itself with its red bill, tipping up a white-patched wing or pulling a gleaming red foot out of the water. And of course in feeding,

like other divers, they would tip over on their bills and disappear for a few moments at a time.

One of the big fellows did sit up and take notice when a Marsh Hawk I had been watching came out and squealed at me. The transformation was amusing. From lying prone on the water head and neck down, it came up at attention, L, neck drawn high, head alert, and even its short tail tipped up. In a moment, as nothing came, back it dropped at ease, full length on the water. In bathing, *Oidemia* threw off its usual lethargy, ducking, flapping, splattering, and splashing like a canary in a tub. On hearing a noise down the shore one day I was surprised to see one of the big black Ducks go rushing back and forth through the water and then rise and flap its wings till their white flags waved. When a week later I saw the encounter of the rivals, it strengthened my suspicion that *Oidemia* had been showing off.

The white flags show far across the lake and when the great birds fly evenly low over the water the velvety black of the males makes the snow white a conspicuous mark. The disappearance of these white banners when the Scoter drops to its nest is not significant because the bushes hide it then, and the disappearance of the banners when it lights on the water would hardly deceive any enemy, for *Oidemia* is so large and black it stands out across a lake. But on the other hand, to a female Scoter happening to be under water when her mate flew, might not the white flags be a decided help in distinguishing him from black-fronted Scaups scattered out over the lake? When seeing a group of black-fronted Ducks, large and small, on the water one day I thought I had at last found a family of Scoters, but on nearer approach the small ones proved to be Scaups! If it be true that the Scoters remain paired throughout the year and the two forms *deglandi* and *americana* are together in winter the white eye- and wing-patches may well be of use in helping pairs keep together, especially in flight. In taking flight, the Scoters usually seemed to rise easily, but one that I watched flapped and splashed for some time before lifting its heavy weight.

As you watch these great black Sea Ducks sitting like decoys on the still water or flying over a smooth lake, they seem decidedly out of place. But wait till a heavy wind has been blowing for a few days, waves are hammering the shore and all the other Ducks have retreated to sheltering bays. Then perhaps you will see, as I did, a pair of *Oidemia* head out around a point into the teeth of the wind, and as you marvel at their temerity see them settle themselves to ride the billowing waves in their own proper marine character.

The few Ducks of Stump Lake were always interesting to watch in their quiet feeding bays and along the shores both for what they were and what they might be, for one unseen before might appear at any moment. But the spectacular birds of the lake were the Gulls and Terns.

The Black Terns are always striking birds, and at Sweetwater Lake there were so many of them that it might have been called the Lake of the Black Terns. *Hydrochelidon*, Water Swallows, they certainly are, flocks of them skimming low over the surface of the lake, back and forth; hordes of them trooping across the passes and weaving in and out across the sky, their harsh grating *kek'kek* commanding attention from the shore.

As I sat behind the trees and watched them, fascinated by their maneuvers, they hunted close along shore, their actions much like those of the white Tern. On long-pointed wings one would approach, the silver line from neck to elbow

contrasting well with its jet black head. On it would come with bill pointing down till suddenly it put on brakes by spreading its tail till from below the white under coverts gave the appearance of a white tail. Checking its motion so abruptly that it would almost go tail over head, it would plump into the water bill first, giving the droll effects of a sensient bill in pursuit of its food. Sometimes the handsome *Hydrochelidon* would flap slowly low over the surface, its black head and neck mirrored in the water; again it would hover above the lake like a Sparrow Hawk, and dive like a shot arrow.

A white Tern, the Common Tern, that I watched on Stump Lake hunting back and forth along three or four yards of shore, would hover, body almost motionless, in the face of the wind, looking down watching the incoming waves with black-crowned head bent and red bill pointing down till its quarry was espied, when it would drop straight as a plumb line so close before the oncoming waves that it would be spattered by the foam; then with its morsel secure in its bill it would rise again in the teeth of the wind sometimes almost as straight as it had dropped, sometimes with a graceful scoop upward. Back and forth and up and down its short beat it came and went while the Franklin Gulls sat in the sun, walked soberly along the beach, or flew out over the lake to ride the waves, rocking like miniature boats with black bows and sterns. The little Tern when tired of hunting joined the Gulls on a sand spit, as it lit, holding its wings for a moment high over its back, in the beautiful pose so often assumed by water birds.

On the quiet side of the spit the Franklin Gulls disported themselves, some bathing—splashing and ducking—others feeding. A comical effect was produced by one that was looking for food with its head under water, for its raised wings balanced a headless body. When the head reappeared with a tidbit dangling from the bill, an observing neighbor made a dash for the hardly won morsel. While the Franklin Gulls, some with black heads, some with white foreheads and smoky crowns, amused themselves on the sand spit, a few of the large Ring-bills stalked around among them conspicuously. After a storm a close row of the Franklins sat on the lake side of the sand spit with the spray dashing over them. Forty or fifty of them sat in a row at one time facing the wind but with heads turned back resting on their shoulders so that in looking down the shore a long line of gleaming white gull breasts shone in the sun, a beautiful picture against its background of pale green water. Great numbers of the black-headed Gulls were massed on points and sand bars along Devil's Lake, early in July, while others were seen performing aerial maneuvers, circling in complex form, mulling around and around high in the air.

But *franklini* is not to be remembered as a shore Gull. Going to my window in a farm house one day I started with surprise, for a flock of the black-headed birds were flying swiftly in, apparently headed straight for the wall of the house. Wind Gulls they are called locally, as they are said to circle around high in the sky "hollering" before a storm. But they are most widely known for their habit of following the plow—four-horse gang plows I saw them with. Ring-billed Gulls, too, were often met with, flying low over the broken ground or sweeping over the grassy swells looking for small rodents.

It always gave a jolt to one's preconceived notions of Gulls to meet them on land; but after coming to know the great prairies that roll on to a blue

horizon line like the ocean, blown over by the strong fresh wind from far away, it seemed rarely fitting that these great white birds should sail through their sunlit skies. And how they sail! A stirring sight was seen one day, a great wedge of Franklin Gulls like Canada Geese flying high through the sky as if bent on sweeping over and beyond the prairies down to the southern seas.

Washington, D. C., May 23, 1915.

THE FARALLON RAILS OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY

By LAURENCE M. HUEY

WITH FOUR PHOTOS BY LAURENCE M. HUEY AND DONALD R. DICKEY

DURING the past seven years considerable attention and study have been directed toward the home life of the Farallon Rail (*Creciscus coturniculus*), and in many cases the results have proved quite interesting. I have felt, however, that, although nest and egg descriptions have been given by other collectors, the following dates and nesting notes might add materially to what is already known.

I have spent hours and even days on the Rail marshes at all times of the year, and find that even as early as February, on clear mornings, the *clee-clee'-ee* (accent falling on first syllable of last word) may be heard in many places on the marsh. This is particularly true when one has walked about the



Fig. 23. NEST AND EGGS OF THE FARALLON RAIL: THE PRIZE, HIDDEN AWAY IN A DENSE SALICORNIA CLUMP