

and Game Department, and other qualified observers flushed a female Pintail from a clutch of nine eggs located in grass-forb association on the sandy flat at the southwest side of South Humboldt Bay, about 300 yards northeast from the base of the cliff known as Table Bluff. This record is the only indication that we have that Pintails nest in this area.—CHARLES F. YOCOM, *Division of Natural Resources, Humboldt State College, Arcata, California, March 29, 1957.*

Hooded Mergansers at Afognak Island, Alaska.—The observations reported here were made at the research station of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game located at Kitoi Bay on the east side of Afognak Island in southwestern Alaska. The area is covered by a fairly typical forest of Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*).

On November 10, 1956, I collected a female Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) in salt water at the outlet of Big Kitoi Creek. Its ovary looked immature, but it may have been one that had retrogressed. Its lower mandible was yellowish, becoming black near the horn-colored tip. The upper mandible was gray with a yellowish tinge ventrally at its base and it had a darker horn-colored tip. Its feet were gray-green to yellow-green, and its iris was brown. The skin has been presented to the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

On November 13, another female Hooded Merganser was seen and on the next day she, or yet another one, was observed swimming with a male Barrow Goldeneye (*Bucephala islandica*). On the 17th and again on the 20th of November, when I left the station, a female was observed near the outlet of Big Kitoi Creek. It seems likely that these records pertain to a single bird residing in the area during at least the latter half of November. These observations apparently constitute an extension of the known range of the Hooded Merganser from Haines in southeastern Alaska where it is known to breed.—ARCHIE S. MOSSMAN, *Douglas, Alaska, April 18, 1957.*

Observations on a Coot-Muskrat Relationship.—On April 12, 1955, while engaged in a field study at Lake McMurray, Skagit County, Washington, we noted certain relationships between the American Coot (*Fulica americana*) and the muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*). The observations were made in mid-afternoon in a protected marsh area on the southern edge of the lake. The weather was marked by a strong southeast wind. The vegetation typified that of an acid bog. Red alder (*Alnus rubra*), willows (*Salix* sp.), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), and red cedar (*Thuja plicata*) formed the over-story. Creek dogwood (*Cornus occidentalis*), Labrador tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*), hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*), and salal (*Gaultheria shallon*) provided a secondary cover. The surface plant cover, with water depth varying from six to eighteen inches, was composed of skunk cabbage (*Lysichitum americanum*), duckweed (*Lemna minor*), and *Potentilla palustris*.

A group of five muskrats and seven to eight coots occupied the area under observation. The muskrats were feeding on the skunk cabbage roots. The spring of 1955 was phenologically late. Whether skunk cabbage was a food of preference or necessity for muskrats and coots is not known. The actions recorded here, however, indicated a possible food crisis. The skunk cabbage root has a mass of adventitious lateral roots that grow perhaps twelve inches below ground surface. The muskrats dug down along the main shaft of the root to the lateral roots, bit them off and carried them back to a favored, surface eating roost to devour them. These roots averaged an eighth to a fourth of an inch in diameter and three to five inches in length.

The coots were bathing and feeding on the pond surface. When a muskrat would leave its eating roost to secure more skunk cabbage roots, a coot would quickly clean up the root shreds left on the roost or on the adjacent water surface. Coots, apparently, could not dig or cut the skunk cabbage roots for themselves. On one occasion, a coot attempted to steal a root from a muskrat. The rat chased the coot about eight feet across the pool. No other attempts at thievery, in the presence of the rat at least, were noted. Coots were also observed to eat duckweed, sparingly.

The coots and muskrats on this area worked in close proximity, often passing within a foot of each other without noticeable antagonism. Coots appeared to be more antagonistic to each other than to muskrats. No antagonism between muskrats was noted.

When a Cooper Hawk (*Accipiter cooperii*) appeared, the relations that were being observed were interrupted. One coot, late in making its departure, maneuvered under a horizontal, six-inch willow

limb while the hawk, standing on the limb, attempted to catch him. Inadvertently, the observers flushed the hawk.—WILLIAM Q. WICK and HARTE E. PENTTILA, *Washington Department of Game, Mount Vernon and Aberdeen, Washington, March 23, 1957.*

An Unusual Merganser Fatality.—A female Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*) was found dead (fig. 1), apparently from choking, at Cascade Lake, Orcas Island, Washington, on March 24, 1957. Inspection indicated that a sculpin, *Cottus* sp., which the bird was attempting to swallow, became lodged in the merganser's throat. The preopercular spines of the sculpin were embedded posterior to the commissural point on each side of the duck's head. The fish had a standard length of 149 millimeters and weighed 64.3 grams.

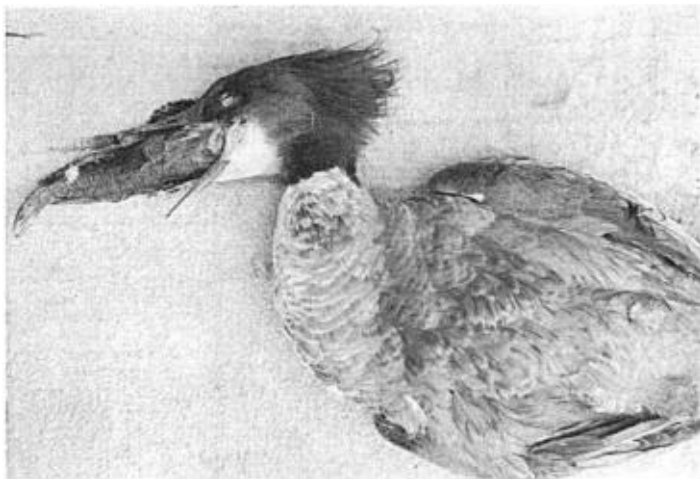


Fig. 1. Common Merganser with sculpin locked in throat; Cascade Lake, Orcas Island, Washington, March 24, 1957. Photograph by William Q. Wick.

Jewett, Taylor, Shaw, and Aldrich (Birds of Washington State, 1953:155) mention that "when opportunity offers [this merganser] is known to eat to surfeit" and that "many of the fishes eaten are of little or no economic value, but others, as the salmon and trout, are of high importance."

The merganser discussed in this note was dissected for food analysis. Cascade Lake, where the bird was found, contains a basic game fish population of four species of salmonids. Listed in order of abundance, the species are: rainbow trout (*Salmo gairdneri*), cutthroat trout (*Salmo clarki*), silver trout (*Oncorhynchus nerka kennerlyi*), and eastern brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*). In addition to game fish, Cascade Lake has a small population of non-game fish. Of these, sculpins are apparently in the majority. The food content of the throat, gullet, and gizzard is shown in the table.

| Item | Weight in grams |
|--|-----------------|
| <i>Cottus</i> sp. (the choking agent) | 64.3 |
| <i>Cottus</i> sp. | 2.7 |
| <i>Cottus</i> sp. | .4 |
| Family Cottidae (partial)* | 1.4 |
| Family Cottidae (partial)* | 6.2 |
| Cestode (2) adult (host undetermined) | .8 |
| Miscellaneous gizzard contents (eggs, grit, bones, etc.) | 18.9 |
| Total food weight | 94.7 |

* Probably genus *Cottus*, diagnostic characters partly digested.