

THE BALD EAGLE ON CURRITUCK SOUND.

BY H. H. BRIMLEY, RALEIGH, N. C.

On Currituck Sound the Bald Eagle may be classed as common.

The "Sound" is a stretch of water some forty miles long and narrow in proportion. The water is brackish—I have drank it when pushed—and shallow, and the whole expanse is the winter resort of innumerable water-fowl—Whistling Swans and Canada Geese in thousands, and ducks, Canvas-backs and Redheads especially, in tens and hundreds of thousands, if not millions. Deer are found on the "Banks," and Bear are not uncommon in the swamps. The large growth around the shores is mostly pine, and there do the Eagles make their resting place.

I well remember my first introduction to this bird. Riding along the road from the steamboat landing to my host's house, seated in the straw at the bottom of the cart that was drawn by a festive steer of pig-headed proclivities, when overhead loomed a great, shadowy form through the gathering dusk of the January evening, and my first Bald Eagle passed out of sight into the surrounding gloom.

To prepare a collection of the water-fowl of the state was my object, and during the time that I stayed I had good opportunities of studying the habits of the Eagles. It was rarely that a good, searching look all around would fail to detect one or more of these noble birds, and frequently, several would be in sight at once.

My host owned and controlled quite a lot of marsh suitable for point shooting, and also, some of the small, outlying islands much frequented by ducks and geese, all being free to his boarders. He employed some four or five professional gunners, who killed ducks for the market when not employed in providing sport for the guests of the house.

On one occasion two of them were shooting over a stand of decoys set off the point of "Five Islands." A bunch of Redheads swung down over the stools, leaving several of their number on the water as the gunners let them have it.

Before the men had time to leave the blind and take out their boat after the cripples, a large Bald Eagle swept over the water, picked up one of the ducks, brought it to the Island close to the blind, there to be discussed at leisure. This was too much for the gunners ; the Eagle was promptly laid low and left where it fell. It was some days before I heard of this, it being too common an occurrence to be thought worthy of special mention. I went out to "Five Islands" as soon as I could after hearing of it, but found the specimen too far gone to be saved. It was a very large female in adult plumage. I saved one of the claws, and some New Yorkers who came along about then in the light-house tender, saved the other.

As near as I could estimate, there were not less than two hundred professional gunners shooting on the Sound, and besides these there are the members of some seven or eight ducking clubs, as well as a number of individual sportsmen.

The immense amount of shooting done by this army of hunters results in thousands of crippled fowl, and on these the Eagles feed and grow fat. Although I have never been there in Summer time, I presume the Ospreys keep the larder supplied then ; in Winter their services are not required.

Once, when weary of waiting in a blind for the fowl that did not come, I had a good chance to watch the performances of an Eagle in pursuit of his dinner. Several hundred yards away was a large flock of Coots feeding, diving with an effort and a splash, as these birds do ; the noise of their movements being distinctly audible where I stood. Suddenly a Bald Eagle appeared on the scene, sailing low over the Coots, not more than three or four feet above the water. The birds in his immediate vicinity dived or flew on a few yards and always, for a small space around him, there was a patch of clear water, while beyond that the Coots were as thick as fleas on a white dog in Summer time. The Eagle kept quartering back and forth for some time, occasionally making a dash at a bird that had let him get a little too close, but always unsuccessfully. This was kept up for

quite a while until the whole flock gradually worked out of sight. Industry was apparently unrewarded in this case.

Knowing that I wished to kill an Eagle, one of the farm hands offered one day to take me within gunshot of a pair. He was hauling pine straw with a cart and yoke of steers, and said that if I would get into the cart, he would drive me right beneath a pine in which were a pair of them. I grabbed my gun and a few shells loaded with No. 1, and jumped into the cart in a hurry. By and by we came within sight of the tree; and there they were sure enough, two splendid white-headed fellows, the sight of which set my heart thumping like the recoil of an old musket loaded for "baar." On we went, the cart jerking and jolting over the stumps and prostrate sticks until right beneath the tree. This was my first experience of being within gunshot of an Eagle, and to say that I was flurried is putting it mildly. Instead of jumping out and taking a fair shot from solid ground, I stayed in the cart, aimed at the lower one of the two, and fired just as the wheel of the cart flopped down in a rut. The shot went somewhere, probably not within ten yards of what I aimed at, and as the birds left the tree, I gave them the other barrel—with like success. I pass over the next five minutes; what was said was not for publication, but only as a guarantee of my good faith.

In driving over to the store at the steamer landing on the canal, the Albemarle and Chesapeake, one day, an Eagle was seen on a sand bar, running out into Coinjock Bay, feeding. I got out of the buggy and with my .38 Smith and Wesson in hand, crept up behind the bushes as near as I could. The Eagle saw me and rose, and I gave him all five bullets as quick as I could pull trigger, but he did not stop. In fact he seemed quite in a hurry to get away.

On several occasions in coming back home through the pines, one of these great birds would crash out of the trees in front and sometimes a snap shot would be tried, always unsuccessfully, however. To tell the truth I did not kill an Eagle while I was there, but could probably have collected

a few had I devoted much time to them. One of the gunners finally procured me an adult male, and with that I had to be satisfied.

Immature, dark-brown specimens were sometimes seen, but were not as plentiful as the full-plumaged white-heads. The natives call the dark birds Washington, or Gray Eagles.

I have taken it for granted that crippled ducks form the chief food item of the Currituck Sound Eagles in Winter almost entirely from hearsay evidence, and I do not think I am mistaken in this, as the evidence of the market gunners all points that way. Frequently could the great birds be seen carrying something in their claws about the size of a duck, and from the ease with which the cripples could be caught along the edges of the marsh and from what I saw and heard, the conclusion is natural that the Eagle of this locality is an epicure, living principally on the flesh of the toothsome Redhead and Canvas-back.

Regarding their nesting I have no data to give. I was told, however, that there were no less than three nests on one single island, and I see no reason to doubt the statement. From their abundance it seems to me probable that they must nest in some numbers along the shores of the Sound; and from their wary habits, and the fact that they are not much molested, or systematically hunted, either for themselves or their eggs, I think it will be years before this noble bird is driven from his chosen home and well-filled larder on Currituck Sound.

A BIRD OF THE NORTHLAND.

(*Spizella monticola.*)

BY HARRY E. MILLER, S. E. N. Y. STATE.

In the last days of the tenth month, golden October, when all the leaves have fallen strewing the ground with a tinted carpet of many colors; when the days are slowly growing colder, reminding us that winter is soon to reign over the rest of the seasons; after other songsters have