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NORTH DAKOTA.

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NORTH DAKOTA, as far back as I can remember, has never been boosted as some of our states have. It is one of the most wonderful states in the Union, one becomes convinced of this after spending a few days traveling through some of the counties. No saloons, few spots with "bright lights," and almost void of manufacturing plants.

Lacking in artificial play grounds, navigable streams, and automobile highways, it is a land of plenty for those who live the simple life.

For the bird lover it is matchless. No unsurmountable obstacles are to be encountered, such as unseasonable weather, vermine, treacherous quagmires, vast forests, high mountains, malaria, or poverty.

True it is, that many species of birds are becoming rarer, but relatively speaking I believe this state will continue indefinitely to attract and retain its large per cent of the feathered tribe.

Prior to my first North Dakota invasion I received advices to the effect that the region was not the paradise it used to be. I could see that in more respects than one, notably the vast number of buffalo skulls lying about on the prairie. For the ornithologist, wishing to do any field work, the opportunities



Nest of Ferruginous Rough-leg.
Photo by Mr. Peck.

are so favorable, that subsequent visits to other sections of our country seem insignificant by comparison.

The vicious hawks, like the Sharp-shin, Cooper's and Goshawk, are of infrequent occurrence. The same may be said of the Horned Owl.

Probably the artist would find little to rave about, were he to visit North Dakota. Too much of a sameness in the land and its dwellings.

I imagine the geologist and botanist would both revel about the glacial formations, coulees, and disappearing lakes. The latter are without inlet or outlet, and evaporation is transforming into peninsulas, what were until a few years ago islands on which large colonies of gulls nested.

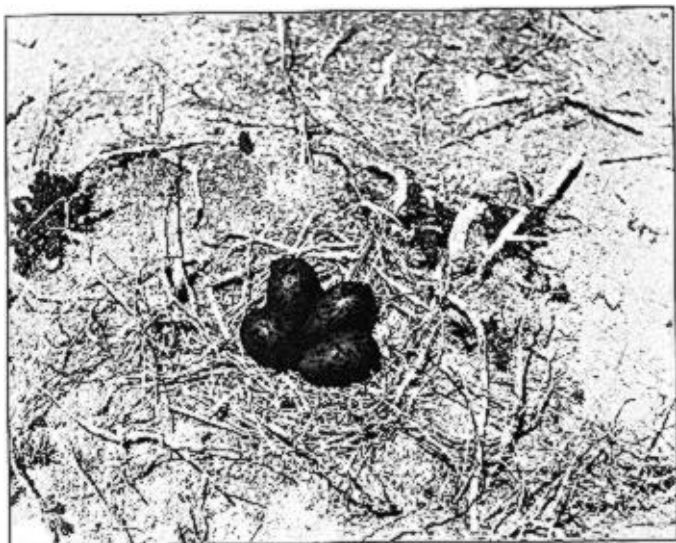
Today these "pot holes" hold countless millions of small aquatic animal life where graceful Avocets and the retiring Piping Plovers are lured to the edges of this green stagnant water.

In the bayous the Wilson's Phalarope, stately Godwit and many ducks accumulate. Upland Plovers and Willets roll their notes from the virgin prairie heights. Pinnated and Prairie Sharp-tail Grouse abound in many places, which clearly illustrates the temperament of the Dakota settlers, who allow such splendid resident game birds as those to thrive and propagate in cultivated sections.

The Crane dance is rarely heard or seen today—a performance of regular and common occurrence a score of years ago, when the sloughs were quite remote from habitation. This grand bird seems to require isolation.

That silent and timid king of hawks, the Ferruginous Rough-leg, still patrols the uninhabited sections of the state. The nest is usually situated near a colony of ground dwelling rodents, which is subject to extermination through the raids of this raptore.

In 1900 I was attacked by a pair of Canada Geese when I attempted to capture the goslings. Only those who have visited the nesting place of this wary fowl can realize its bold and aggressive nature while the young are in the down.



Nest of Avocet.



Avocets Just Hatched.

Driving over the uneven, but hard, and well formed, wagon roads, one is impressed at the buntings that sing along the roadways.

The Chestnut-collared Longspur was encountered everywhere through Pierce and Benson Counties.

The song flight is sweet, delicate and subdued. McCowan's Longspur is less common, but its song is even more pleasing than that of its brown-naped relative.

The most gushing display of vocal ability is poured forth by the handsome Lark Bunting as he launches into space from the bushy highways.

In the bunch grass of virgin prairie, Mallards, Shovellers and Pintail retire to nest. The Gadwalls, Baldpates and White-winged Scoters may be startled from their nest among rose bushes, buck brush, etc., usually near a fair sized lake. The Scoters appear late in June, to breed, coming presumably from the North, for they are known in the middle states as late fall and winter visitors.

Blue and Green-wing Teals, Lesser Scaups and Ring-necks are partial to damp grassy places, bordering coulees or marshy areas.

Canvasbacks, Red-heads and Ruddies construct substantial floating nests, midst rank vegetation, and frequently the nesting site is completely surrounded by deep open water. As you approach this cover the female paddles gracefully away, after cleverly covering the eggs with down.

The products of the little stiff-tailed Ruddy are remarkable. The nine or ten eggs deposited, are considerably larger than those of any other species of duck mentioned, except the Scoter. In one respect the Ruddy's eggs differ from all other American Wild Duck eggs, because the surface of the shell is granulated, instead of possessing the glossy or oily finish, typical of our other ducks.

In the groves of poplar and other Dakota timber, Golden-eyes come early to seek a cavity suitable for a setting of ten light blue eggs.

I found one Hooded Merganser breeding, the only "Fish

Duck" I observed. This variety also nests in hollow stumps and stubs.

The last, but most fascinating spot to visit, took me across a weedy stretch of prairie, full of hummocks. This was the one place where Baird's Sparrow was common. A dozen "trilling" males in a space of forty acres. Descending from this table land, we see and hear the little Clay-colored Sparrow, where the cover might remind us of genuine Field Sparrow under bush.

Before me is a vast expanse of green meadow, low, damp and mossy. Many voices are familiar and remind us of visits to Illinois marshes. We recognize the Bittern, Coot, Redwing and Yellow-headed Blackbird, Bobolink, Yellow Warbler, Maryland Yellow-throat, Savannah Sparrow, Marsh Hawk, and Short-eared Owl.

You eliminate these and there are other sounds, less, or wholly unfamiliar, to the average observer.

Conspicuous among them is a low wheezy song, vibrating in waves through the still air of a June sunset. So appropriate a song for this desolate, but awe-inspiring landscape. The vesper recital of Nelson's Sharp-tail Sparrow, a fairly common summer resident, away out here on the big coulee marsh.

I stand in the midst of that paradise, where in 1896 one of Dakota's pioneer ornithologists noted Swans, Cranes, Geese, Curlew, Pelicans and Comorants all dwelling unmolestedly. What a sight it must have been, for today it seems to me to be enchanted.

Resting against a boulder, reveling in the prolonged sunset, a metallic "click" penetrates the verdure directly in front. The author has several imitators. The birds are ventriloquists and you can't disturb nor dislodge them. Take two stones the size of black walnuts and bring them together squarely. This will convey to you a proper interpretation of the notes. They issue from throats of the little yellow Rail, the feathered mouse of the Northern swales.

Chicago, Ill.