

THE WILSON BULLETIN

A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF ORNITHOLOGY

Published by the Wilson Ornithological Club

Vol. XLI

DECEMBER, 1929

No. 4

Vol. XXXVI (New Series) Whole Number 149

IN SEARCH OF THE LOON (*GAVIA IMMER*) WITH MOVIE CAMERA

BY OWEN J. GROMME*

*Illustrated with Photographs by the Author and Frontispiece by
Dr. Frank N. Wilson.*

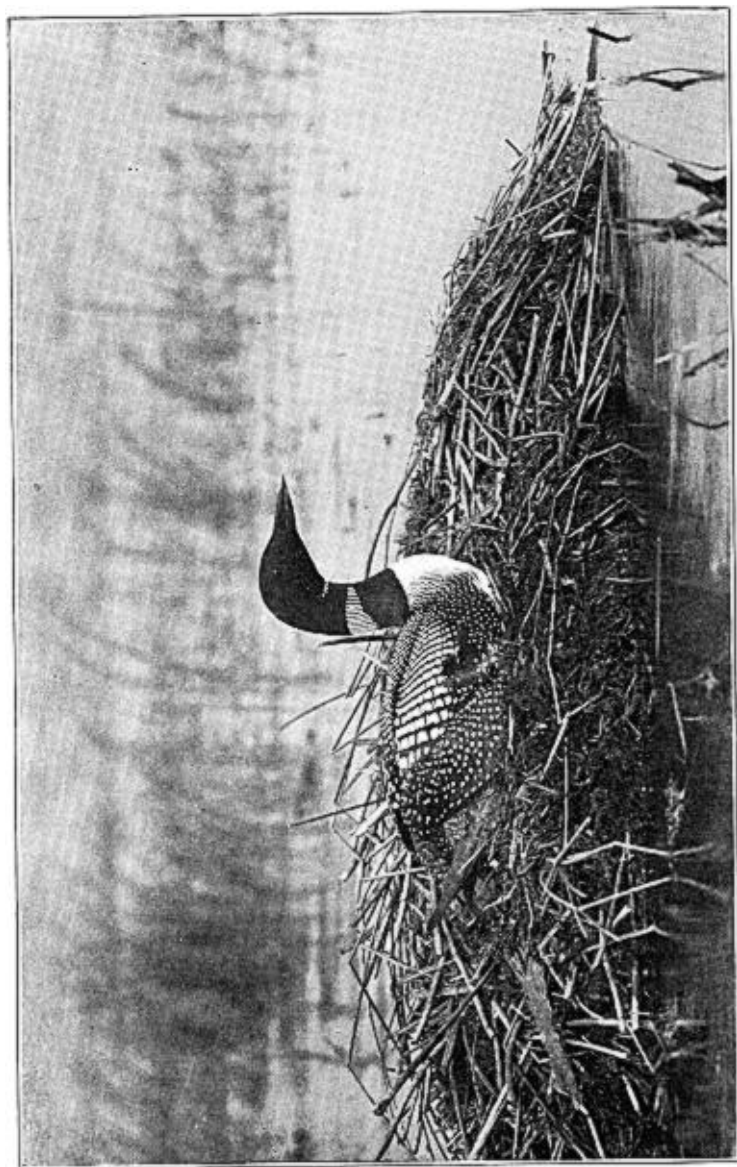
In Northern Wisconsin the large area known as the Land O'Lakes furnishes almost unparalleled opportunities for the naturalist and wild life photographer. Many years ago the waters of the hundreds of natural lakes were raised to facilitate logging operations; and the resulting deep thoroughfares make it possible to travel for many miles by canoe with few land portages.

In the spring of 1925, during the month of June, the Milwaukee Public Museum party, while engaged in general field and movie work, located the nest of a Loon in Bass Lake, Michigan, just across the Wisconsin line. The nest was merely a heap of vegetation and contained the usual two eggs. It was situated on the only cattail islet in the lake, and a nearby clump of willows suggested itself as a possible means of concealment from which a photographer could work.

Having had no previous experience with the Loon, a general discussion ensued as to just how to go about getting the movie camera close enough without disturbing the subjects. An old unused scow looked likely enough, so with the aid of hammer and nails and a few boards it was made temporarily seaworthy. A rude, spacious canvas blind was constructed over a light framework in the bow and built to accommodate the cameras and operator.

Next morning the party started out with the clumsy barge in tow of a canoe, propelled by a small outboard motor. A heavy head wind brought progress to a snail's pace, as the blind acted as an impediment which put us more or less at the mercy of the wind. Consequently, our "rudder end" was continually pulled out of a straight course. When out in the middle of Mamie Lake the barge began to sink, so a member of the party was assigned to a one-man bucket brigade. After an hour of hard work, the "Loon Island" was reached.

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The Loon on Its Nest in Northern Michigan

Photograph by Dr. Frank N. Wilson.

The two Loons were observed out on the lake several hundred yards from the nest, and seemed to manifest no apparent interest in our activities.

As the nest island was nothing more than a floating bog, the scow was easily towed up behind the willow bush and brought to a position from which the front of the blind was but seven feet from the nest. By filling the scow with water it was sunk to firm bottom, thus assuring a rock steady footing for the camera tripods. A rude seat was constructed for the operator and holes cut in the canvas through



FIG. 1. Blind from which Loons were photographed.

which the camera lens was to project. Everything was made in readiness so that the camera outfit could move in without in any way disturbing the surroundings. It was decided to give the birds several days to acquaint themselves with the new surroundings before attempting any photographic work.

While maneuvering the blind into position, a faint peeping was heard in the direction of the nest. Investigation proved the interior of the eggs as the source of the sound, so we decided that the hatching was soon to take place.

On the morning of the second day, three of us in a canoe quietly paddled out to the "set up" and were encouraged by the sight of one

of the old birds as she left the island. She had at least accepted our blind as part of the general order of things. The writer and camera were quickly placed within the blind, and the two remaining men paddled away. Immediately the cameras were focused and convenient peep-holes cut in the canvas for observation. As is the general rule, the writer prepared himself for the usual long vigil. Imagine his surprise when upon trying out one of the peep-holes he beheld Mrs. Loon there at the edge of the nest and almost within arm's reach. She had appeared as if by magic, but later observations proved that

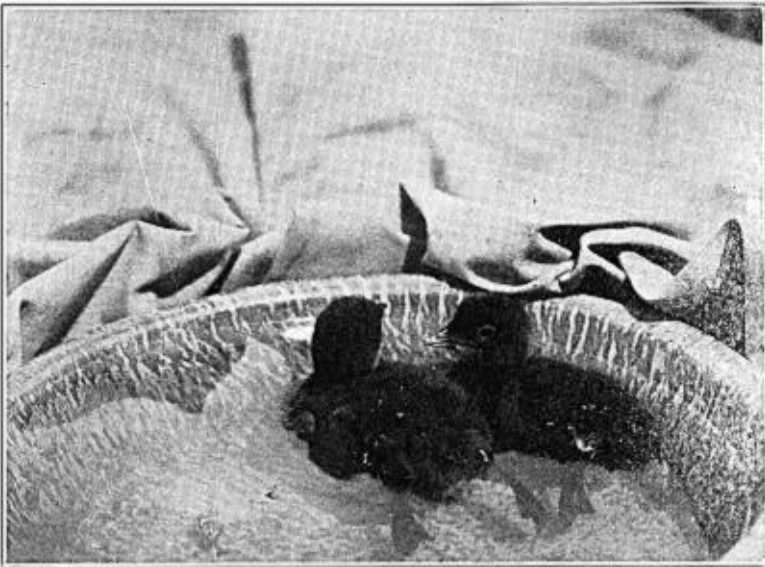


FIG. 2. Young Loons.

this was the "submarine route" up a tiny waterway that led from the open lake to the nest.

Perhaps from the Loon's point of view, the departure of the men in the boat removed the human element and totally unsuspecting she came straight to the nest before the departing boat was two hundred yards away. Needless to say, this moment was for the movie operator, an exciting one. So absorbed was he in admiration of the graceful wild thing, that he almost forgot about the camera. Lest the Loon frantically depart at the first click of the shutter, the "Akeley" was very slowly brought into motion, and soon the normal speed of sixteen pictures per second was attained. Ten—twenty—fifty feet of film, and the bird remained motionless. Perhaps she associated the

low buzz of the shutter with the continual hum of boat motors going up and down the lakes—at any rate she held her ground. In my excitement, a board was accidentally rattled and the Loon disappeared like a flash. In less than five minutes she was back again. Clumsily she climbed aboard the nest, and while resting on her entire tarsus and feet, she slowly turned over the eggs. This she did with the body quite erect and with the shoulders of the wings slightly away from her sides. The neck was bent downward at an angle of about forty-five degrees, and the bill when brought in contact with the egg, was slightly opened like a shears and the sides used to maneuver the eggs into position. This gave the bill two points of contact, thus enabling the egg to be moved in any desired position. Accompanying photographs show this action quite clearly.

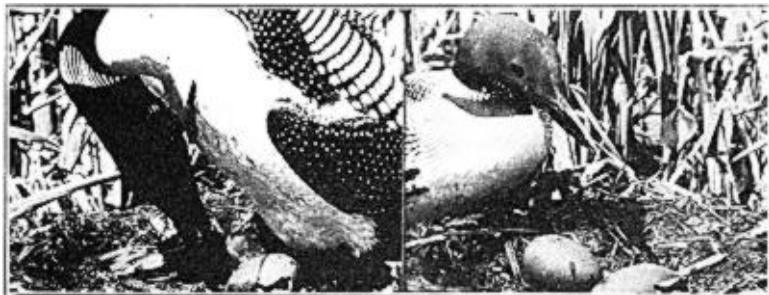


FIG. 3. Loon approaching nest. Shifting egg with partly opened mandibles.

After a brief inspection, she pushed herself forward a few inches, and very heavily flopped down. It seemed as if the eggs would be broken, but the forward part of the breast only received the force of the impact, and she carefully backed over the eggs nestling them under the breast well to the rear of the body. As she covered the eggs completely, their exact position could not be observed from the operator's limited point of vantage. She quietly settled to her brooding, but kept an unfaltering gaze of her red eye on the source of the sound in the blind, for every movement was being recorded on the ribbon of film.

She remained on the nest for half an hour—left for five minutes, and returned repeating the same performance described above. The operator stayed in the blind for the remainder of the hours of light, and the bird's several departures and returns were repetitions of already recorded performances. She always turned the eggs upon her

return. During the operator's time in the blind, the other bird was nowhere in evidence.

It was hoped that the following day would find us "sitting in" on the hatching, but a driving cold rain discouraged any work from the blind. As we had expected, upon our return the next bright day, we found only an empty nest with the flattened fragments of eggshells. Our time was limited and it was impossible to await hatching from other nests, so our "much movied" Loon family was soon located in the shelter of a quiet cove on the opposite side of the lake. From the bow of a canoe, both young were photographed as well as the frantic maneuvers of the adults in their vain attempt to distract our attention from their helpless offspring.

Considering our efforts well repaid, we postponed further work with the Loons for a later date, and returned to Milwaukee.

MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM,

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN.

ON A COLLECTION OF GYRFALCONS FROM GREENLAND

BY WALTER KOELZ

The bird collection of the University of Michigan contains eighty-one Greenland gyrfalcons. All but nine are in juvenile plumage; four are full fledged nestlings. Except for three specimens (two nestlings and one adult) taken by me along Smith Sound north of Cape York (about lat. 78° N.) and five from the Lehn-Schioler collection, Copenhagen, taken on the east coast at Carlshavn (lat. 72° N.) and Shannon Island (lat. 75° N.) all the rest are from the west coast from Upernivik (about 73° N.) to Frederikshaab (about 62° N.).

The three Smith Sound birds were taken as follows: two nestlings (male, female), Etah, August 13, 1925; adult male, Iglooda-hauny, August 20, 1925. The five east Greenland birds have the following data: Carlshavn, adult female, September 25, 1923; juvenile female, September 2, 1921; juvenile male, September 28, 1923; juvenile female, September 19, 1921; Shannon Island, juvenile male, September 9, 1920. Of the other birds, listing the localities from north to south, juveniles are present as follows: two from Upernivik, "summer" and December 21, 1925; two from Godhavn, September, 1923; fifteen from Christianshaab District, September 12 to November 5, 1925, and one February 25, 1926; fourteen from Egedesminde District, August 23 to November 4, 1925, and 1926, and two nestlings July 15, 1926; one from Holstenborg, fall, 1928; one from Kanga-