

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Turkey Vulture in Cape Breton Island, N.S.

— On October 12, 1946, I saw a turkey vulture west of Bucklaw, in neighbouring Inverness Co. The bird was gliding southwest from Bucklaw Mountain and across Narrows Pond. It was under observation for some minutes, and a good view was obtained through binoculars as it passed, at close range, where I was standing on the road. It was nearly the size of the bald eagle, which is quite numerous in this area, but its head was much smaller; its tail was much slimmer; the wings were dark black forward and lighter black posteriorly. The bird hardly flapped once during the minute or two it was in view.

The turkey vulture is a rare bird in the Maritime Provinces, and this seems to be the second record for Cape Breton Island, having been recorded formerly by R. W. Tufts (1927; Can. Field-Nat. 41, p. 65). — E. V. GOODWILL, Ottawa.

Stomach Stone in a Muskrat. — Through the kind offices of Mr. J. Dewey Soper, the National Museum received from Mr. Sam Waller of The Pas, Manitoba, a stomach stone from a muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*). The muskrat was trapped about March 20, 1947, on Swanee Lake (probably near The Pas) and the stone is said to have been found in the stomach.

The stone is smoothly curved, nearly spherical, measuring 16.5 mm. by 18.5 mm. in size, surface uniformly rough, colour pale yellowish olive. Where the surface was scraped the material shows a fine grain with a medium gloss and a rather brighter very pale olive yellow colour as compared with the untouched surface.

Sawn in half the cross section presents a solid, close-grained surface, apparently uniform in hardness and scratched fairly easily with a steel point. The stone is apparently built up of a series of concentric layers. In the center is a green dot about one and a half millimetres across. The central section 10 mm. in diameter is of layers of pale green of various shades; the outer layers are whitish and the surface layer greenish.

Pieces of the stone treated with hydrochloric acid effervesced rapidly and largely disappeared indicating the presence of considerable calcium carbonate. A few small, flexible flakes of what appeared to be fibrous

material were left in the acid; probably they were of vegetable origin.

Hard masses of various kinds have been found in the stomachs and intestines of many mammals but calcareous masses are usually found only in herbivores (Adami, 1912; "Principles of Pathology", Vol. 1. p. 874). Some such masses, which are fibrous and absorptive, have been known as "madstones" and superstition had it that they were of curative value if applied to the bite of a mad dog (Bryant, 1924, Jour. Mammal., 5, pp. 200-201).

They are largely composed of ammonio-magnesium phosphate and lime salts. (Bryant, l. c.) Veterinary research has indicated that contributory factors may include lack of vitamin A, insufficient water intake due to a wet diet (animals on a dry diet drink much more water), and a suitable nucleus in the stomach, such as animal or vegetable hairs or some indigestible object like a nail or a pebble. In the latter connection it is noteworthy that concretions introduced experimentally into animals may continue to grow even though the animal receives a normal diet. On the other hand concretions may not form in animals receiving an excessive mineral diet, in the absence of a suitable nucleus (Newsom, 1938, Jour. Am. Vet. Med. Ass., 45, p. 495).

Lichtwitz (1944, in J. Alexander's "Colloid Chemistry, Theoretical and Applied", Vol. V) suggests that concretions of the concentric type are formed by a Liesegang process involving the alternating deposition of a protein component and an encrusting material.

These stomach concretions seem to cause the animals no ill effects as contrasted with renal concretions (kidney and bladder stones) which may be very rapidly fatal. — A. L. RAND and P. A. ORKIN, National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.

Juvenile Skunks. — While it is well known that most young mammals suckle at the same teat, little is known as to what, if any, order is maintained by the young when on safari with the mother. Young skunks usually, if not invariably, follow the mother in single file. The opportunity to observe something of the order followed occurs so rarely that it is worth reporting a case where one of the young could be definitely identified. In



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