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CANVASBACK (AYTHYA VALLISNERIA)

GAME BIRDS OF THE PACIFIC

By H. T. PAYNE

President of the California Game and Fish Protective Association

Illustrated with Photographs from Life by the Author

FOURTH PAPER—THE BAY AND SEA DUCKS

IN THESE papers I have divided the ducks of the Pacific Coast into fresh and salt water varieties, not that there is any line of demarcation in the hunting of the two kinds, but because an article on the ducks of this region would be too long for one issue. Then, too, this is a natural division, for the ornithologist has divided them into two subfamilies distinct from each other. On our shooting grounds, however, whether the blind is on the saltwater marsh or the freshwater pond, both kinds are sure to fall to the gun in almost equal numbers. Of the more common of the freshwater varieties the gadwall and the mallard are seen the least on the salt marshes and the tide overflows, yet even these are quite often met with in these places. So it is with the saltwater species. All except the scoters are frequenters of the mountain lakes, freshwater ponds and overflows. The red-head, both

species of the scaups, the canvasback and the ruddy are commonly found on the fresh waters. The ring-neck, and, in fact, the red-head are much more common on these waters than on the salt or brackish marshes.

With the exception, therefore, that certain species always predominate at a given place at certain times of the season, the sportsman's aim brings down a well-assorted bag, let him shoot where he may, on marsh, pond or overflow, from Washington to Mexico.

Before the sportsmen of the Coast began to realize the danger of over-slaughter to the supply of the future and secured the enactment of laws limiting the day's bag, the number of ducks that might be killed in a day's shoot on our hunting grounds was limited only by one's power of endurance. Better judgment now prevails, however, and a sense of moderation has taken the place of the erstwhile

unreasonable slaughter. In different parts of the Coast the day's limit varies from twenty-five to fifty, except in Mexico where there is no restriction. These limit bags, in any favorable locality, are generally easily made, and, to their credit be it said, the sportsmen are better satisfied to-day with a limit bag than they used to be with the result of a day's shoot when it reached a hundred or more. The market-hunter, however, kills all he can slaughter with his big guns, and this, too, in open violation of the law. Yet while the law in California limits him to thirty-five in a day, the same as any one else, he is, for some unknown reason, allowed to continue the slaughter as he pleases and the markets to handle in illegal numbers his illegally killed game.

CRIMINAL SLAUGHTER

I have said that the Pacific Coast is the greatest duck-shooting country on earth, but it will not long be so unless our law makers put a stop to the traffic in ducks. The old fallacious argument that our ducks breed in the far north, and thus, whatever our slaughter may be, it has no effect on the next season's supply, is criminally against the interests of the state. The fact is that most of the ducks killed on these shooting grounds are bred within the Pacific states. But even were it true that our ducks breed in the Arctic, the effect of an unreasonable slaughter would be the same, for as the number returning to these grounds is reduced, the number that will be bred to return to us in the fall must be reduced in the same proportion, since migratory birds migrate along the same lines from year to year, returning in the spring to the same breeding grounds and in the fall to the same winter quarters. Therefore, if the people of the Pacific Coast wish to maintain their excellent duck shooting—worth to the whole people millions of dollars annually through the money spent by sportsmen for transportation, rents, the erection of clubhouses, salaries of keepers, gun repairing, clothing, guns, ammunition and a hundred other things—they must do with the ducks as they have done with the quail, deer, doves and shore birds; they must put a stop to their sale. A few men who shoot for the markets, kill more ducks each season than the one hundred thousand sportsmen who shoot for their own pleasure and who place into general circulation millions of dollars that enter into every avenue of trade.

The great irrigation scheme now being perfected by the United States government,

which when completed will drain the marsh lands of the Klamath lakes, is destined to seriously affect the supply of ducks from the country that extends from the northern counties of California to Mexico. These lakes have been the breeding grounds of millions of our ducks, which work south as soon as the young birds are strong enough of wing to begin their migrations, and the reclaiming of these marsh lands will soon show its effect upon the supply unless a stop is put to those men who engage in the business of killing every duck possible from the opening to the close of the season, in defiance of the laws enacted for the conservation of this valuable asset in the resources of the state.

KING CANVASBACK

The canvasback (*aythya vallisneria*), the duck *par excellence* of the Eastern states, is very plentiful in the more northern portions of the territorial scope of these articles, though I have seen them in good numbers on the lakes of Mexico. It is the general supposition that the canvasback breeds in the far north, but from the fact that they are found on the lakes of Mexico as early as September, they must also breed on the higher lakes of our mountains. On our lower marshes they are a late duck, but they appear on our mountain lakes quite early in the season. Canvasback shooting on our waters affords the finest of sport, as it does not partake so much of flock shooting as it does on the Chesapeake and the Delaware river. While I certainly prefer our shooting, by no means do I prefer our ducks. When killed on the mountain lakes, our canvasback possesses nearly if not quite as fine flavor as do those of the eastern states, but when killed on the bays and salt marshes of California they are fishy and barely palatable. This is caused by the absence of the so-called wild celery, properly tape grass (*vallisneria spiralis*), the common food of the Eastern canvasback. Our birds have the habit of feeding largely on the shallow waters of the tide lands and marshes and of consuming large quantities of crustaceans, such as clams, crabs, mussels and the like, and it takes but a few days' diet of this kind to make the canvasback about the poorest of ducks.

I shall never forget the experience of an eastern friend with whom I was shooting a number of years ago. The morning flight was about over and we were paying less attention to the ducks than to an interesting conversation—we were only about thirty yards apart—regarding the equipment of his

clubhouse on the Delaware. Glancing to my right, I saw four canvasbacks coming with a rush directly over his head and called to him to "mark." He jumped to his feet a little too late and instead of turning around and taking them going from him he undertook to fire at them right over his head. In leaning backward, however, he lost his balance and went splash into the water on his back, but, firing as he fell, he brought down two of them. The cold bath didn't disconcert him in the least; getting up and shaking himself like a spaniel, he declared that it was the best shot he had ever made in his whole experience as a duck hunter.

The red-head (*aythya americana*) is quite a common duck in the southern sections of the Coast hunting grounds. Though purely a bay or saltwater duck, that is, belonging to the subfamily (*fuligulinae*) it is not found to any great extent on the saltwater marshes, preferring the higher lakes, ponds and reservoirs of the mountain valleys and foothills. I found them one season in great numbers on the San Rafael marshes, high up in the mountains of Lower California, and all the shooting two friends and myself wished to do had no effect in driving them away, although the ponds of the marsh were few and small.

THE SPECULUM AS GUIDE

The American scaup duck, or blue-bill (*aythya marila nearctica*), the lesser scaup (*aythya affinis*) and the ring-neck (*aythya collaris*) are very plentiful in the northern section as well as on the higher lakes of Mexico. These three species are generally grouped together by the sportsmen of the Coast under the name of black jacks, black ducks and black-heads, all three species being considered as the one variety, and the lesser scaup as the younger birds. While I am making no attempt at classification or technical description in this paper, I will here state for the guidance of those who wish to know to which species each of these ducks belong, that the males can easily be distinguished by noting the color of the speculum or bright band on the wings and by the color of the metallic reflection of the head and neck. The speculum of the American scaup, or larger blue-bill (*aythya marila nearctica*), is white, with the head and neck showing a greenish reflection quite pronounced in the sunlight. The lesser scaup, or little blue-bill (*aythya affinis*) has a white speculum the same as the larger species, but the metallic reflection

of the head and neck is purple. The ring-neck (*aythya collaris*) has a gray speculum, which, though quite light in color, can easily be distinguished from the pure white of the other two. The reflection of the head of the ring-neck is a dark indigo blue. The bill of the ring-neck is quite different from that of the scaups, being much darker in color and more of a sooty tinge and with a faint bluish band across it about half an inch from the end. The females of the latter resemble each other very closely but the difference in size will generally determine to which species they belong. They can be told from the female ring-neck by their white speculums. The female ring-neck has the gray of the male, but this does not distinguish it from the female red-head. The smaller size of the ring-neck and darker appearance of the head and neck will always indicate to which species the female belongs. The bill of the female red-head meets the skull in quite an abrupt manner while that of the ring-neck has more of the sloping character of the canvasback. In the breeding season the ring-neck male has a dirty orange ring around the neck which disappears wholly, or nearly so, before the beginning of the hunting season. The ring-neck is generally more plentiful on the fresh waters. I have seen great numbers of them at the mouth of the Colorado river. In fact, both the ring-neck and the lesser scaup range much farther south than do the larger species, for while few of the larger scaup are seen in Mexico great quantities of the little blue-bills are found throughout the Republic, especially on the salt marshes of the two coasts. All of these three species breed along the mountain lakes from California north.

The American golden eye (*glaucionetta clangula americana*), while not at all common on our shooting grounds—only occasional kills being made—are found in good numbers on the Gulf coast of Mexico.

The Barrows golden-eye (*glaucionetta islandica*) is another of our visitors that are seen only in small numbers and are seldom met with far from the coast.

THE UGLY DUCKLING

The ruddy duck (*crismatura rubida*) is a very common duck on our shooting grounds, from one end to the other, though as a rule it is not much sought after by our sportsmen. When feeding on the salt marshes they are not very palatable, it is true, but when killed on fresh waters they are one of our finest flavored ducks, if properly cooked. After refusing

RED-HEAD (*AYTHYA AMERICANA*)

many shots at these little ducks and even many times failing to carry home those I did kill, it remained for Mr. Babcock, then of the Coronado Hotel, of San Diego, to demonstrate to me the real value of the ruddy duck. I was one of a party shooting with him on his preserve at Otay dam. When we came into the house after our morning's shoot, a most enjoyable one, he asked each member of the party what

kind of a duck he wished for his dinner. Mallards, canvasbacks, sprigs and widgeons had been named, so when he came to me I answered that any kind would do me. To this he replied: "Then you shall have one of my favorites." When dinner was ready before each plate was a beautifully roasted duck of the species chosen by the member of the party for whom that plate was laid, but

AMERICAN SCAUP, OR BLUE-BILL (*AYTHYA MARILA NEARTICA*)

RING-NECK (*AYTHYA COLLARIS*)

the plates in front of Mr. Babcock and myself each contained two plump little birds that I did not recognize in their undress uniform. After I had tasted of one, Mr. Babcock asked: "How do you like my selection?" "Exceedingly," I answered, "but what are they? I never ate anything better." "The much despised ruddy," was his reply, "the superior of the canvasback when properly handled."

The best evidence that I fully endorsed all that he claimed for the ruddy duck is the fact that there was nothing left of my two birds but well-picked bones. The ruddy duck may well be called a resident species over the whole of the Pacific Coast shooting grounds, for they breed not only on the lakes and streams, but on the lower marshes as well, throughout the whole territory.

AMERICAN GOLDEN-EYE (*GLAUCIONETTA CLANGULA AMERICANA*)

BARROW'S GOLDEN-EYE (*GLAUCIONETTA ISLANDICA*)

The butter-ball, or buffle head (*charitonetta albeola*) is another common duck all over the country. But where we have so many larger and better ducks they are little sought for, and are generally considered poor shooting. Yet I recall one occasion when a friend and I were shooting on a couple of foothill ponds where many of these little ducks had congregated, they furnished us with fine sport.

The larger ducks were soon scared away, but the little butter-balls would not leave. One of us was stationed at each pond and we soon had them all in the air. They are a small mark and swift flyers when well in the air and gave us fully an hour of really fine sport.

The old squaw, or long-tailed duck (*clangula hyemalis*) comes but little into California, though a few are killed each year in Washington

RUDDY DUCK (*ERISMATURA RUBIDA*)

BUFFLE-HEAD, OR BUTTER-BALL (*CHARITONETTA ALBEOLA*)

and Oregon. I killed one several years ago as far south as Los Angeles county, the only one I have ever known to get that far away from his northern home.

The harlequin duck (*histrionicus histrionicus*) is a northern bird that comes but little into the United States on either coast. A few stragglers are met with in Oregon and Washington and an occasional one is killed in

California. These and the old squaw add a pleasing variety to our mounted collections, but nothing to our sport.

The scoters, or coots, as they are called on the Atlantic coast are all found on this coast southward to Mexico. Of these the white-winged scoter (*oidemia deglandi*) is the most common, being found in large numbers on all the bays and inlets of the coast as far south as

HARLEQUIN DUCK (*HISTRIONICUS HISTRIONICUS*)

the Magdalena bay, Lower California. The American scoter (*oidemia americana*) and the surf scoter (*oidemia perspicillata*) are quite common, though not as numerous as the white-winged. While the scoters are considered game in many places along the Atlantic Coast they are hunted but very little here, our great abundance of better ducks furnishing plenty of good sport without resorting to these inferior sea birds, which are hardly palatable to a discriminating taste.

FATAL HOSPITALITY

Possibly nothing that can be written regarding the duck shooting of the Pacific Coast will convey a better idea of its excellence than a description of the artificial shooting grounds of Southern California. In that section of the state natural marshes were few and small, and were soon turned into preserves. Ducks were abundant; it was only shooting and feeding grounds that were lacking. All along the coast either easy artesian or close surface water could be obtained. Clubs were organized, lands purchased and teams put to work scraping out locations for great shallow ponds wherein feed would grow in abundance. This done, artesian wells were bored, or, where this could not be had, surface wells were sunk and gasoline or electric power from nearby trolley lines installed for pumping and the ponds filled. Spacious clubhouses were built and furnished with all the luxuries of home, and many of these but a few yards from one of the numerous trolley lines that radiate from Los Angeles. These shallow ponds were soon supplied with plenty of fine feed and therefore became favored resorts for the birds. I cannot give the exact number of these artificial ponds, but in the vicinity of Los Angeles there are two dozen or more, and generally these afford better sport than do the natural marshes, and have the additional convenience of a trolley service close to the door.

NOW ACCESSIBLE

I shall not attempt to name the more favorable localities for duck shooting. They are to be found all along the coast marshes, the lakes of the foothills and the mountains and wherever there is an overflow or a pond filled by the winter's rain, from Washington to the great lakes of the Zona Templada of Mexico. One place, however, I shall mention because it is little known and little visited by our sportsmen. That is the mouth of the Colorado river. Ducks assemble there very

early in the season in numbers that will tax the credulity of any one who has not seen them. There they find an abundance of feed and there they remain until their northward flight begins. The time was when this place could only be reached by a row boat down the river from Yuma. Now the railroad to Imperial and Calexico leaves but a short distance to be driven by team. The waterfowl that congregate at this point is a sight to witness which is worth a much longer trip. I know of no place so attractive for a winter camp. The climate is all that any one can desire, with so little rain that one may remain there for a month without experiencing a single shower. The gulf furnishes fine saltwater fishing, lots of turtles, and shell fish in numbers and variety almost beyond belief.

Such are the numbers and variety of the ducks of the Pacific Coast, and such the shooting grounds. But this enumeration of the wide variety of species, and this description of the hunting grounds conveys but a poor idea of the grand duck shooting which our sportsmen enjoy, for to properly estimate the quality of their sport there must be added to the quantity and variety of their game the peerless conditions under which that sport is had.

BY COURTESY ONLY

We of the "wild and wooly West" are not wholly boorish. We have a little respect for the learned men who make our almanacs, and in deference to their erudition and to the feelings of our shivering friends of the ice-bound East, we refer to certain months of the year as winter, when in fact we have no such season except by courtesy. The beginning of the rainy season varies in the several latitudes, but it marks the real beginning of our spring. The russet brown of our foothills and valleys changes at once to the bright emerald of the new-born grass. A few weeks later the California poppy carpets the valleys with its deep rich gold, until the goddess Flora, descending with her magic brush and palette of inimitable colors, paints every plain and hillside in stupendous mosaie patterns of blue and red and yellow and white and purple. The haze of the dry months has been washed from the atmosphere, the heat of summer has passed and the balm of spring is about us. The air is filled with the hum of bees, the new-born butterfly floats lazily upon its parti-colored wings, and tiny feathered throats warble their happy songs. The towering mountain peaks, glistening with their crowns

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (*OIDEMIA DEGLANDI*)

of spotless snow, rear their heads in silent grandeur, a distant reminder that there is such a season as winter some place, which many of us have never known and many more have happily fled from forever. It is in this

matchless spring, lasting, with only an occasional rainy day, through the whole open season of four and one-half months that the sportsmen of the Pacific Coast enjoy the grandest of duck shooting.

PESCADERO PEBBLES

By CHARLES KEELER

Crash of the crystal surf all night on the wind-wild beaches,
 Boom of the billows that break day-long on the pebbled reaches,
 Roar of the riotous waves on rock ridges shattered and Sundered,
 Moaning and sobbing and shouting the turbulent elements thundered.

Idly I lay on the sea-rim, the pebbles I dropped through my fingers,
 Jewels of jade and of beryl with opaline sea-tint that lingers
 Long as the wild waves wet them where mermaidens tossed them away,
 Sparkling in beauty neglected to glow in the salt sea spray.

Out of the ocean of longing, whose shore is the heart-rim dreary,
 Peereth a wild mermaiden through turbulent sea-mist eerie,
 Wine-red earncians and crystals translucent at my feet flinging,
 And salt tears wet them and leave them aglow by the mad waves singing.

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LIN McLEAN

Begun in the April Number

By OWEN WISTER

Illustrated by H. D. Couzens

XIV

SEPAR'S VIGILANTE

JESSAMINE sat by her brother until he died, twelve hours afterward, having spoken and known nothing. The whole weight of the horse had crushed him internally. He must have become almost instantly unconscious, being held in the saddle by his spurs, which had caught in the hair cinch; it may be that our loud cheer was the last thing of this world that he knew. The injuries to his body made impossible any taking him home, which his sister at first wished to do.

"Why, I came here to bring him home," she said, with a smile and tone like cheerfulness in wax. Her calm, the unearthly ease with which she spoke to any comer (and she was surrounded with rough kindness), embarrassed the listeners; she saw her calamity clear as they did, but was sleep-walking in it. It was Lin gave her what she needed—the repose of his strong, silent presence. He spoke no sympathy and no advice, nor even did he argue with her about the burial; he perceived somehow that she did not really hear what was said to her, and that these first griefless, sensible words came from some mechanism of the nerves; so he kept himself near her, and let her tell her story as she would. Once I heard him say to her, with the same authority of that first "come away:" "Now you've had enough of the talking. Come for a walk." Enough of the talking—as if it were a treatment! How did he think of that? Jessamine,

at any rate, again obeyed him, and I saw the two going quietly about in the meadows and along the curving brook; and that night she slept well. On one only point did the cow-puncher consult me.

"They figured to put Nate on top of that bald mound," said he. "But she has talked about the flowers and shade where the old folks lie, and where she wants him to be alongside of them. I've not let her look at him to-day, for—well, she might get the way he looks now on her memory. But I'd like to show you my idea before going further."

Lin had indeed chosen a beautiful place, and so I told him at the first sight of it.

"That's all I wanted to know," said he. "I'll fix the rest."

I believe he never once told Jessamine the body could not travel so far as Kentucky. I think he let her live and talk and grieve from hour to hour, and then led her that afternoon to the nook of sunlight and sheltering trees, and won her consent to it thus, for there was Nate laid, and there she went to sit, alone. Lin did not go with her on those walks.

But now something new was on the fellow's mind. He was plainly occupied with it, whatever else he was doing, and he had some active cattlework. On my asking him if Jessamine Buckner had decided when to return east, he inquired of me, angrily, what was there in Kentucky she could not have in