

UNUSUAL NESTING SITES OF THE AMERICAN
MERGANSER (*Merganser americanus*.)

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In all works on North American birds, nests and eggs the nesting situation of this species is given as being in a hole in a tree, after the manner of the hooded merganser, buffle-head, American golden-eye and wood duck. I was therefore very much surprised to find American mergansers nesting in holes under boulders on an island in Lake Winnipegosis, Manitoba, during June, 1903.

My son and I found about 30 pairs nesting on Gun Island on June 16th. All the nests that we could reach were built far back at the end of dark passages under boulders on the highest part of the island, some nests being from four to six feet back from the entrance and were hard to get at; in some cases my boy had to crawl between the boulders to reach the eggs and I had to pull him out by the feet. In one hole he caught a female on the nest, and afterwards my boy tied a fishing line to its leg and let it swim around the boat. It was astonishing with what speed it cut through the water using its wings and fairly flying under water, after which we gave it its liberty and it flew away. The nests contained from 8 to 12 eggs, one nest containing as many as 13. They are easily distinguished from other duck eggs by their very large size and pale buff tint, averaging 2.60 x 1.80. One nest contained eggs laid by two females as half the eggs were of a deeper tint and different size and shape than the others. The down is pale greyish-white after the fashion of all other ducks that nest in holes in trees or in the dark. The male mergansers flew away as our sail boat approached the island, but the females sat close dashing past our feet as we scrambled amongst the boulders where they were nesting. On this same island several red-breasted mergansers had nests containing 8 and 9 eggs each; their nests were not at the end of burrows, but in depressions under dense undergrowth. The eggs are smaller than those of the American merganser and of a darker tint, being yellowish-drab or warm drab; average size 2.50 x 1.70. The down is also

darker and of a warm greyish tint. Both ducks are very destructive to fish and are therefore disliked by the fishermen. They are known to gunners as sawbills, and their flesh is rank and unpalatable.

ORNITHOLOGICAL NOTES.

During the past season I investigated an unusual nesting site of our common black duck (*Anas obscura*). This well known and extensively distributed species usually builds its nest on the ground, but last June I visited an island in the St. Lawrence where a pair had taken possession of a last year's crow's nest and successfully brought off their brood. The nest, which was built after the usual style of crow architecture, was saddled on a limb of a hugh elm, forty feet from the ground, and was reached after a difficult climb with climbing irons. A liberal supply of down had been furnished by the duck and incubation was well advanced. Just how frequently such nesting sites are resorted to by these ducks it is difficult to say; had the bird not been accidentally observed flying to the tree her presence would never have been suspected. I photographed the nest containing the ten eggs, but owing to the extremely awkward position in which I had to make the exposure only eight are shown. The duck sat very close and did not leave the nest until I was within a few feet of it.

THE BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cephus grylle*).—June 10th last, while walking along the harbor front, I saw a black guillemot swimming rapidly toward the open lake. I believe this is the first instance of this species having been observed in this locality. Speaking of this bird in 1885 the late Mr. McIlwraith, in "Birds of Ontario," says one was shot in Hamilton Bay many years ago, and according to the Catalogue of Canadian Birds one was taken at Toronto in 1885. These seem to complete our records for Ontario. While at the Magdalen Islands last year I saw many flocks; they are swift flyers and expert divers. Unfortunately, a large percentage of the guillemots that occasionally stray as far west as Lake Ontario die of starvation, so often the common fate of sea birds that wander so far from their natural habitat.

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