

GENERAL NOTES

Pelicans killed by lightning.—Although press reports of the destruction of birds in flight by bolts of lightning are not unknown, the present writer has considered that most of the alleged fatalities from this cause have been due chiefly to an over-active imagination. Investigation, however, reveals the fact that there are a few substantiated cases, to which the following may be added.

Among newspaper clippings received by the U. S. Biological Survey was an Associated Press dispatch from Nelson, Nebraska, under the date of October 29, 1939, to the effect that "lightning struck a flock of pelicans flying across the Emil Schief farm northwest of here, killing 33." A letter addressed to Mr. Schief at Nelson, making inquiry regarding the accuracy of the statement, brought an interesting reply. Writing from Lawrence, Nebraska, on November 9, 1939, Mr. Schief (the press dispatch had misspelled the name) stated that the occurrence took place on April 4, 1939, when there had been a series of heavy thunder-showers. Anticipating that water would be over the road, Mr. Schief's 14-year-old son Arthur started on horseback about 3.30 in the afternoon to meet his two younger brothers who would then be on their way home from school. While he was on the road, a bolt of lightning struck within 100 yards of him, and on looking in that direction he observed a flock of 75 White Pelicans (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), flying about 100 feet above the ground and from which 34 were falling. One fell in a pool of water but revived in a few minutes and flew off in the direction taken by the rest of the flock. The others were dead and on some the feathers were singed. Mr. Schief's letter concludes with this comment: "This is a true and correct statement."—FREDERICK C. LINCOLN, *Biological Survey, Washington, D. C.*

Louisiana Heron in Massachusetts.—On September 7, 1940, as I was working the Rowley River salt marshes with the Misses Ruth and Lois Batchelder in their power-boat on the lookout for birds, there crossed our bows at no great distance a medium-sized heron with dark upper parts and a white belly. Though none of us had ever seen a Louisiana Heron in life, we were, collectively, familiar with its appearance in pictures, and that was the species that immediately occurred to us. The tide was high and we followed the bird about through river and creeks, and though we never got very near, we saw it clearly enough to get the diagnostic colors and markings: general appearance resembling that of the Little Blue Heron; upper parts, including wings, blue; a white area on the back (like a Dowitcher, as one of us remarked); under wing-coverts white; belly white, with a sharp line of demarcation on the breast; reddish on the neck. Later consultation of books and examination of skins in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy convinced me that the bird was indeed a Louisiana Heron (*Hydranassa tricolor ruficollis*), a species new to New England, not having been reported before, so far as I can learn, from farther north than Long Island, New York. While we watched the bird it was within the limits of the town of Ipswich, Massachusetts. It is, of course, regrettable that this observation could not have been fortified with a specimen, but confirmation was obtained when the bird was seen distinctly the next day by Mr. S. Gilbert Emilio, of the Peabody Museum, Salem, and Mr. Charles P. Preston, of Virginia. Mr. Preston had been familiar with the species in the South. It was also seen in the same marsh, September 15, by Mr. Wendell Taber. All three of

these men were satisfied with the identification.—FRANCIS H. ALLEN, *West Roxbury, Massachusetts.*

Winter food of Snow and Blue Geese in Delaware.—The commonest winter food of the Snow Goose on the marshes of the Bombay Hook Migratory Waterfowl Refuge, in central Delaware, consists of the roots and culms of *Spartina alterniflora*, commonly known as salt-marsh cordgrass. While studying a flock of 3,700 Snow and 18 Blue Geese (*Chen hyperborea atlantica* and *C. caerulescens*) on the refuge, December 11, 1939, at a distance of 300 feet, I noticed them feeding to a considerable extent on several other grasses in the vicinity. Investigation revealed that both *Spartina patens* (salt-meadow cordgrass, or bent hay) and *Distichlis spicata* (saltgrass) had been used consistently for food; not only were fragments of the roots strewn around on the surface, but holes in the mud leading down to the roots were frequent, and in some cases the holes were ringed with the tell-tale evidence of white feathers from the necks of the Snow Geese.

This particular flock was later observed for several hours at midday at a distance of about 100 yards. Most of the birds were resting and some few were feeding. There were always a few birds in the air, but since it was a cold, windy day, the majority of the birds were relatively immobile.

Dr. Clarence Cottam in a summary of the known observations of the Blue Goose in the Atlantic Coast States (Auk, 52: 436, 1935) gives but one record for the State of Delaware, and that was based on a single bird shot by a gunner. Therefore, these additional data should be of interest.—L. W. SAYLOR, *Patuxent Research Refuge, Bowie, Maryland.*

Breeding grounds of Ross's Goose at last discovered.—With the discovery of the Snow and 18 Blue Geese (*Chen hyperborea atlantica* and *C. caerulescens*) on the breeding grounds of Ross's Goose (*Chen rossi*), one of the last of the major mysteries of our more northern birds has been solved. By a process of elimination the country north of the Thelon River and east of Great Bear Lake in the Northwest Territories of Canada seemed the last remaining probability for the nesting area of this species. The interest of various officers of the Hudson's Bay Company was aroused in the subject and under the authority of Mr. R. H. G. Bonycastle of the Fur-trade Department of that company, Messrs. Angus Gavin of the Perry River, and E. Donovan of the King William, Posts undertook an investigation of the area. Ascending the Perry River some thirty miles from its mouth July 1 of the past summer (1940) some tundra lakes were reached. On rocky islets in some of these lakes considerable concentrations of Ross's Geese and a few Blue Geese (*Chen caerulescens*) were found breeding. Photographs of incubating birds, nests and eggs, and skins and eggs of the former were secured. These have been received by the National Museum of Canada and fully identified. The Perry River empties into the Arctic Ocean at the bottom of the Queen Maude Gulf about longitude 102° west. The terrain occupied is a low-lying ancient sea bed with little relief and many lakes of various shapes and sizes studded with rocky islets. A full account is under publication in 'The Beaver,' the house organ of the Hudson's Bay Company, and in the 'Canadian Field-naturalist' for December 1940.—P. A. TAVERNER, *National Museum of Canada, Ottawa.*

Mallard Duck returns to destroyed nest.—Late on the afternoon of May 19, 1939, we were driving along a country road three miles east of Mooresville, Limestone County, Alabama, and chanced to see a severe grass fire, which had been