

Three birds arrived from a near-by field and began hopping in the branches, climbed to the treetop and, in the sun, started preening their plumage. This continued for a time; then suddenly one of the birds dashed against one of the bunches of dried capsules, bit and pulled until it broke off a stick, then flew with this in its bill to a branch with heavy foliage. So I confirmed my suspicion that they were building a nest.

Soon there were two birds working hard while the third remained preening in a branch in the vicinity of the nest. At about 9:00 A.M. the three birds flew out to the near-by field. They returned one hour later and perched in a tree some ten meters distant from the nest. Up to this time I had thought they were two adults and perhaps a young of a previous nest, but now, watching them carefully, I saw that the three had very worn plumage. Then, dispelling my last doubt, one of the birds approached one of the others and, after some mutual preening, copulated; then to my astonishment, he flew toward the third bird and again copulated. It was evident that there were two females and a male.

After some minutes the three flew to the nest. One female sat in the nest and arranged the material the other brought, sometimes receiving it in her bill and now and then going out of the nest and bringing dried sticks from the near-by bunches of capsules. Meanwhile the other female made one trip after another, bringing from a near-by tree fresh green leaves which she cut in bunches.

In the meantime the male was perching on a branch in the vicinity of the nest, watching the females working and now and then calling. Sometimes the two females both carried material but never of the same kind, one bringing fresh green leaves and the other dried sticks; both materials were gathered high up in trees in the vicinity. This hard work continued during all the morning, with now and then a little rest.

About noon they stopped work and perched close together in a branch near the nest. Suddenly the male copulated with one female and then at once with the other. After a time the three flew toward the field, and for the rest of the afternoon they did not return.

Next day all was about the same, but I saw three copulations with both females. The females worked hard all morning, but in the afternoon not one bird was seen in the vicinity of the nest. This promised an interesting study, but unfortunately that night there came a heavy storm with rain and many branches of trees were broken, including the branch that held the nest, which was on the ground. The birds were not seen again.—MIGUEL ALVAREZ DEL TORO, *Museo de Historia Natural, Tuxtla Gutierrez, Chiapas, México.*

House Finches "drinking" peaches.—I watched a female Common House Finch (*Carpodacus mexicanus frontalis*) feeding on my peaches this morning (July 26, 1947). From a distance of seven or eight feet I watched her every motion as she sat on a horizontal limb on a level with my eye, feasting with apparent relish on an Elberta directly in front of her. The peaches were firm, just ripening, and not yet advanced to what might be called the juicy stage. Each bit of peach which she removed from the fruit was pressed rapidly and intermittently between her mandibles. Her throat muscles indicated the drinking process. After desiccating each piece of pulp or skin, she discarded the residue with a shake of the head. Although she must have consumed some of the peach pulp she appeared to be seeking only the juice.

When she flew after about eight minutes, I picked the peach. It had been opened on the rosy or blush side. The opening was completely to the stone and was about one by one and a half inches. The skin around the perimeter of the opening was neatly cut and notched as though done with pinking shears.

My berries and apricots have suffered much each season by depredation of House Finches. In fairness to the multitude of English Sparrows which frequent my yard, I should state that I have never observed them feeding on my fruit.—EMERSON A. STONER, *Benicia, California.*

Wood Duck courting a Mallard.—During the last two winters a male Green-winged Teal (*Anas carolinensis*), presumably the same bird, has remained with the hundreds of tame Mallards (*Anas p. platyrhynchos*) wintering at Forest Park, Springfield, Mass. This winter a male Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) has also been present there; and a Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis rubida*) was identified at the same place by Miss Fannie A. Stebbins on Dec. 17, 1947.

All this was interesting enough. But today (Feb. 26, 1948) I witnessed an example of complex relationship which seems worth recording. The male Wood Duck was courting a female Mallard; the male Green-winged Teal was driving off all drake Mallards which approached this oddly-matched pair. The Teal showed no interest in the Mallard and no animus against the Wood Duck.

When first observed, the three were standing on the ice about 150 feet from me. The Wood Duck practically leaned against the bigger Mallard, while the little Teal stood a foot or so away from the former. Presently all three arose together and flew over to a stretch of open water where my daughters were feeding bread to the Mallards. Here I watched them for 20 minutes, at an average range of 15 feet. The Wood Duck never left the side of his hefty 'lady,' but remained close to her, repeatedly whistling and squeaking, wherever she swam. The Teal, meanwhile, continued to be a self-appointed escort for the pair, forcing any near-by drake Mallard to turn away by rushing at him with lowered head. When, at length, the Wood Duck and Mallard climbed out of the water onto the ice, their midget guardian followed them. And when I left, the three birds were standing as I first saw them: the pair close together, the Teal a foot or so away.

Kortright (1943: 152) says: "The Mallard crosses freely with other species, especially with its near relative, the Black . . . Crosses with the Gadwall, Pintail, Baldpate, Green-winged Teal and other species are also known."

Apparently the Wood Duck may be included among those "other species" with which the Mallard crosses. One wonders if it might not do so with all the *Anatinae*.

But how may we interpret the action of the Teal?—AARON MOORE BAGG, 72 *Fairfield Ave., Holyoke, Massachusetts.*

The Quails of the Sinai Peninsula—Another interpretation.—Mr. Chapman Grant's note in *The Auk* for January, 1948, entitled "Those tall Sinai quails" gave two alternative interpretations of a passage in the Book of Numbers (XI: 31) both of which seemed to me unlikely to be correct. The Vulgate of St. Jerome certainly uses the word "volabant," which can have no other meaning than "flew" or "were flying," and that would make more sense than to assume that the birds stood two cubits high, but it presents so different a picture from the one I get from the King James version that I couldn't accept it as the true rendering. I therefore consulted a recognized authority on the Hebrew language and literature, Dr. Robert H. Pfeiffer, a lecturer on the Semitic languages in Harvard University and Curator of the Semitic Museum there. He writes me:

"I would suggest that Numbers XI: 31 should be translated from the Hebrew as follows: 'And a wind went forth from the Lord and it brought quails from the sea, and dropped them by the camp, all around the camp one day's journey in each direc-