

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.*

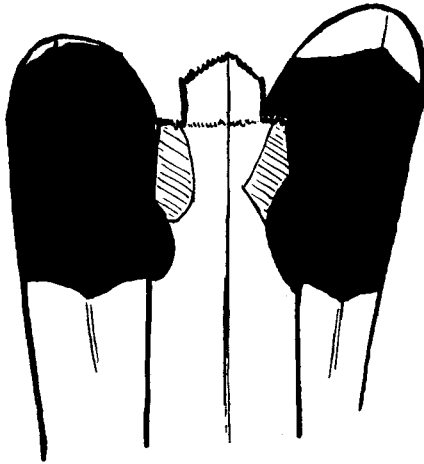
The Quails of the Sinai Peninsula—Another interpretation.—Mr. Chapman Grant's note in *The Auk* for January, 1948, entitled "Those tall Sinai quails" gave two alternative interpretations of a passage in the Book of Numbers (XI: 31) both of which seemed to me unlikely to be correct. The Vulgate of St. 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-

tion so that they covered the ground to the height of two cubits.' You are right in surmising that the Hebrew text means that the quails were spread pretty evenly all over the ground to the height of two cubits. You may be right in figuring that according to the text [v: 32] 66,000,000 bushels of quails were gathered. I leave the mathematics to you. In any case, it is recognized by modern historians that the Israelites in the desert with Moses did not number, as the text [XI: 21] with incredible exaggeration reports, 600,000 footmen, but probably less than one hundredth of that impossible figure. Late biblical authors (such as this one) love great figures. The Hebrew word *salwim* in Numbers XI: 31-32; Exodus XVI: 13; Psalms CV: 40, (translated 'quails') is generally identified with the *Coturnix communis*."

My figures of 66,000,000 bushels were reckoned on 10 homers of 11 bushels each for each of the 600,000 men. If there were only 6000 men gathering 10 homers apiece, 660,000 bushels would indicate pretty good hunting. Even if the quails were not tall themselves, the story is a tall one!—FRANCIS H. ALLEN, *West Roxbury 32, Massachusetts*.

Abnormal rectrix of Sparrow Hawk.—Sutton and Arnold (*Auk*, 55: 281, 1938) and Shortt (*Auk*, 59: 438, 1942) report abnormally developed primaries in a Blue Jay



TEXT-FIGURE 1.—Abnormal rectrix of Sparrow Hawk.

and Ring-billed Gull, respectively. While examining Sparrow Hawk skins in the Louis Agassiz Fuertes Memorial Collection (Dept. of Ornithology, Cornell University) I found a specimen labeled *Falco sparverius paulus* (C. U. No. 1132) with an abnormal tail feather. The bird, a male from Dade County, Florida, was collected by Mr. Fuertes on March 26, 1908. This skin is normal in all respects except for the peculiar rectrix, which is striking because it has no subterminal black band. The tip of the feather is very worn, and a mark of weakness shows about eight mm. from the end. The worn area is rufous in color, and where the band would normally be situated are two patches of gray, one on each side of the rachis, with a small spot of black at the proximal end of each. (See Text-fig. 1).

There is no positive way of accounting for this odd feather unless it was caused by injury to the developing follicle, in which case it is difficult to explain how the feather