

## UNUSUAL NESTING SITE OF THE MALLARD

By O. J. MURIE

WITH THREE PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

THE NEST of a common bird becomes of interest when found in an unusual situation, such as shows a deviation from the ordinary habits of the bird.

When it was reported that a Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) was nesting in a tree seven or eight feet from the ground, I at first thought a mistake had been made and that the bird observed was a Wood Duck, or possibly a merganser. But whatever the species, the nest would be worth investigating.

Accordingly, early in the morning of April 23, well supplied with camera and films, I boarded the "Ione", bound for the duck's nest.

It was a little more than two and a half hours run down the Willamette and up the Columbia to the region about Columbia Slough. The steamer



Fig. 48. BRANCH OF COLUMBIA SLOUGH, OREGON, IN VICINITY OF MALLARD'S NEST

stopped to put me off at "Taylor's Landing", and I lost little time in looking up the farmer who was supposed to know about the extraordinary nest. I found him at breakfast. "Yes, it's true," he affirmed. "It's a mallard all right."

I explained to him my interest in the nest, and induced him to leave his work a while and take me to the place. We followed a branch of Columbia Slough, which is here lined on both sides with ash trees and tall cottonwoods. As we walked, my informant told me what he knew about the duck. He first found the nest, with ten eggs, about a week before, and a few days later, April 18, opened one egg to see if the bird was sitting. He had in mind taking the eggs to place under a sitting hen, but found that incubation was already well begun.

We presently took a trail into the woods, and I was cautioned to walk quietly, as we were nearing the place. Soon the tree was pointed out to me, and we crept along carefully until within thirty feet of it. My guide showed me the location of the nest, but neither one of us could see the nest itself or the bird. I was just stepping on a log to get a better view, when off went the duck, a

female mallard, "quacking" as she flew rather slowly out through an opening in the trees. She circled about once, then disappeared down the slough.

I climbed to the nest, eight or nine feet up, and found nine eggs. The reports were true in every particular. The farmer now left me to my own devices and I proceeded to take several photographs.

The strip of woods at this point was not over thirty or forty yards wide, while the nest tree stood some forty feet from the slough bank. It was a shaggy



Fig. 49. ASH TREE, SHOWING LOCATION OF MALLARD'S NEST (MARKED BY WHITE CROSS)

old leaning ash, covered with moss, scattering ferns and other plants, with dried leaves, sticks and rubbish accumulated in various crotches. A large limb branching off from the slanting trunk, formed a level place where dirt and moss had gathered, making a good foundation for the nest, which was simply a depression well lined with down.

After making several exposures of the nest and eggs, I fastened the camera to a nearby limb, with a long cord attached to the shutter. I covered it with moss and ferns, arranged the cord along the ground, then went away in the hopes that the mallard would return to be photographed. But nearly an hour later I crept up carefully, to find that she had not been back. Evidently the camera was not well enough concealed to overcome her suspicions, and, as I feared I had already kept her off the nest too long, I took down the apparatus and left the place.

On May 3 I went back to see if anything further had developed. As I neared the tree, I could see the head of the mallard above the edge of the nest, watching me intently. I looked at her through the field glasses and made a sketch of her on the nest; then tried to get nearer. But the moment I began to move up she flew off as before toward the slough. The eggs were still there and I could see no disturbance of any kind.

A pair of crows had seemed quite concerned at my approach. I thought the duck's nest was the center of their interest and they were virtuously calling "thief" when they imagined a nest robbery was about to take place. But now I spied their nest in the top of an ash tree not more than forty feet away, and



Fig. 50. NEST AND EGGS OF MALLARD ON TREE TRUNK

within fifteen feet of it. I knew the mallard would not sit so close before, and when I climbed to the nest my fears were realized. I was just too late! There were the empty egg shells. Probably not far away were nine mallard ducklings, swimming and diving, not worrying in the least about how they got there.

on climbing, found five eggs. While I was up at the crow's nest the mallard duck and her mate both circled about above me, "quack-quacking" anxiously as they saw me perched so conspicuously in the tree top. This was the first time I had seen the drake at all and from their actions I concluded the eggs must be about ready to hatch. As I was leaving the slough bank I saw them both swimming together a short distance off, waiting to see if I would not go away.

I fully intended to watch faithfully from now on and visit the nest each day, on the chance that I might be on hand when the young were hatched out and ready to descend from the tree. But something detained me each day, until it was May 8 before I again went to Columbia Slough.

Not far from the nest tree I flushed the drake from a little pond in the nearby pasture. The ducks were evidently still in the neighborhood. I approached the

tree cautiously but could see nothing on the nest, even when

## CALL-NOTES AND MANNERISMS OF THE WREN-TIT

By J. GRINNELL

(Contribution from the Museum of Vertebrate Zoology of the University of California)

I WAS AROUSED to the point of assembling the facts for the present sketch by reading an account of the notes and habits of the Wren-tit in a certain popular book on California birds. The account referred to was so at variance with my own impressions of the bird in question that it led me to wonder