

NOTES ON THE OCCURRENCE OF WATER AND SHORE BIRDS IN  
THE LOCHSA REGION OF IDAHO

By R. L. HAND

Fish Lake, in the Selway Forest, lies near the headwaters of the Lochsa River, some twenty-five miles east of the main crest of the Bitterroot Range. At an altitude of 5800 feet, and comprising about 75 acres, it is completely surrounded by rugged mountain ranges. For almost the entire width of the state, east and west, and for at least a hundred miles north and south there are no large, open bodies of water where one would naturally look for waterfowl or waders. The Lochsa River is cut through precipitous cañon walls and in spring and fall is a veritable mountain torrent, while of the numerous alpine lakes, few are more than small ponds, and all are partly hidden by overtowering crags or dense spruce forests.

The records here given are from my notes covering the seasons 1923 to 1929 during which I spent the far greater portion of my time in the mountains of the Lochsa country.

*Aechmophorus occidentalis*. Western Grebe. On October 17 and 18, 1928, three individuals were seen quietly resting on the lake. Most of the time their long necks were curved over their backs, heads resting far back between shoulders, giving them a peculiar, unbalanced appearance. On October 26 of the same year a lone individual was seen at a small pond five miles from the lake.

*Colymbus nigricollis*. American Eared Grebe. A fairly regular migrant in September and October. Usually at least one or two are seen whenever a trip to the lake is made during these months and sometimes a dozen or more are scattered over the water. Earliest noted: August 22, 1928; latest, November 3, 1926. Average for seven years: September 14 to October 16. Occasionally noted on smaller lakes or ponds in the vicinity and, rarely, on the Lochsa River.

*Podilymbus podiceps podiceps*. Pied-billed Grebe. One individual noted twice on the lake, September 25, and again on October 2, 1929. No other records for the Lochsa country, but have been seen on several occasions on the Middlefork of the Clearwater not far from the mouth of the Lochsa.

*Gavia immer*. Common Loon. On July 31, 1923, a lone individual appeared on the lake and was seen frequently from then on until late September. Other records for the lake are as follows: October 3, 1925 (1); September 19-21, 1926 (2); October 17-18, 1928 (9); October 20 (1); October 10-11, 1929 (1).

On October 18, 1928, I watched nine of the great birds swimming abreast up the lake and diving for the small native trout which abound here. The small inlet toward which the birds were heading was literally alive with small trout and a pair of Mergansers were so intent upon their fishing that they allowed me to approach within twenty-five feet before taking wing.

*Mergus americanus*. American Merganser. Breeds quite commonly along the Lochsa and is usually seen on this and other nearby lakes from mid-August to late October. Generally in pairs or small parties of up to a dozen or so individuals. Generally speaking, the commonest water bird in the mountains and the one most likely to be seen on the lake.

*Lophodytes cucullatus*. Hooded Merganser. Rare. Two records: October 18, 1928 (2); October 10-11, 1929 (1).

Not noted elsewhere within a hundred mile radius.

*Anas platyrhynchos*. Mallard. Irregular, but generally present in pairs and small groups throughout September and the first half of October. Average for 7 years: August 25 to October 12. Extremes: July 27, 1928; October 28, 1927. Noted along the Lochsa in spring and fall but not known to breed anywhere in this locality.

*Chaulelasmus streperus*. Gadwall. One record only. A flock of 12 seen on July 28, 1926. Viewed with binoculars in good light from a distance of 25 feet. Not noted elsewhere in this locality.

*Mareca americana*. Baldpate. Generally noted at least once or twice each fall, and sometimes rather common for a short period. On October 3, 1925, about 40 were seen on the lake, but usually they accompany other species in singles or pairs. Average for 4 years: September 20 to October 7. Extremes: August 24, 1928, October 18, 1929. Occasional on other small lakes and casual on the Lochsa.

*Nettion carolinense*. Green-winged Teal. Irregular, but always present during September and October, usually in groups of five or six to a dozen. Average for 7 years: September 1 to October 12. Extremes: August 12, 1926, October 26, 1928. Next to the Merganser this is the duck most likely to be seen on the lake. Occasional migrant along the Lochsa but does not breed in this locality.

*Spatula clypeata*. Shoveller. Two records: October 26-27, 1928 (8); October 7-11, 1929 (6). No other records from this locality.

*Dafila acuta tzitzihoa*. Pintail. One record: October 7, 1929; five, seen in company with Shovellers and Baldpates.

*Nyroca valisineria*. Canvasback. Occasional in October: October 5, 1926 (6); October 17-25, 1928, not uncommon. Generally in small groups and never more than a dozen together.

*Nyroca affinis*. Lesser Scaup Duck. One of the commonest species of ducks throughout the Lochsa drainage, but not often seen on the lakes. From October 16 to 28, 1928, they were seen on Fish Lake nearly every day, from singles and pairs up to a maximum of 16 at once. October 10, 1929, one individual seen. No other records for the lake.

*Charitonetta albeola*. Bufflehead. One record only for the lake, October 16-17, 1928; one individual seen each day. Occasional along the Lochsa in late October and early November. Never more than three or four together.

*Ardea herodias (herodias?)*. Great Blue Heron. Three records as follows: August 19, 1924 (1); September 26-27, 1927 (1); August 23-24, 1928 (1). Occasionally reported (late summer) from the lower Selway River.

*Fulica americana*. American Coot. One record from Fish Lake, October 17, 1928 (a single individual). Another seen October 19, 1927, on Long Lake, a smaller body of water some 8 or 10 miles from Fish Lake (altitude 6300 feet). A very common migrant along the lower Clearwater River but not noted from the mountains except for the two records given.

*Capella delicata*. Wilson Snipe. One record for the lake. Six were flushed in the Alpine Meadow at the head of the lake on September 16, 1924. Occasional individuals seen along the Lochsa in April, September and October.

*Pisobia minutilla*. Least Sandpiper. A single individual seen at the lake August 11, 1926, and again on the 16th. No other records for the region.

*Totanus melanoleucus*. Greater Yellow-legs. A pair seen July 30, 1928. Determined to be this species and not *T. flavipes* from precise measurements taken of tracks in the mud.

*Tringa solitaria cinnamomea*. Western Solitary Sandpiper. Not common, but generally a few seen at the lake each year. In five years the average first seen at the lake was July 31; last seen, August 20. Extremes: July 23, 1927, August 26, 1928. Also noted occasionally along the larger streams and on some of the smaller ponds in late July and during August.

*Actitis macularia*. Spotted Sandpiper. This is a very common summer resident along the Lochsa and Selway rivers as well as along many of the larger creeks in the region. Often noted in pairs and small family groups at Fish Lake in August and early September, but apparently does not breed at the lake.

*Oxyechus vociferus vociferus*. Killdeer. A very common bird along the lower Clearwater but noted in the mountains only as a rare straggler. One seen at Fish Lake on September 19, 1929, and again on September 25.

The following additional species, while not being recorded from Fish Lake, have been noted by me in the same mountainous region, that is, within the Lochsa drainage.

**Larus californicus.** California Gull. A lone individual was seen about the Lochsa Ranger Station on May 29, 30 and 31, 1923. It disappeared on the latter date but was reported from 20 miles down the river a few days later. Very tame.

**Larus philadelphia.** Bonaparte Gull. On October 28, 1925, following a severe storm which brought thousands of ducks and geese into the Lochsa Cañon, eight of these gulls were seen flying above the river and resting frequently on boulders along the bank.

**Querquedula cyanoptera.** Cinnamon Teal. A single individual was seen on the rocks of the river bank just above Lochsa Station, May 7, 1928. While apparently uninjured it was loth to fly and allowed approach to within ten feet.

**Histrionicus histrionicus pacificus.** Western Harlequin Duck. Occasional in May and June along the upper Lochsa. Usually in pairs and probably breeds here sparingly. Have seen none later than July 12.

**Chen hyperborea hyperborea.** Lesser Snow Goose. **Chen rossi.** Ross Goose. As no specimens were taken, which of the above species cannot be indisputably determined; but following the storm of October 27, 1925, thousands of Snow Geese were seen along the Lochsa Cañon from Pete King to Sherman Creek. These were mostly in detached companies of from 25 to 150. All had passed on by the evening of the 28th.

**Branta canadensis canadensis.** Canada Goose. **Branta canadensis hutchinsi.** Hutchins Goose. **Branta canadensis minima.** Cackling Goose.

At least one of the above, and quite likely all of them, are at times seen to pass over the Lochsa Cañon in migration, usually in April and November.

**Olor columbianus.** Whistling Swan. Following the heavy storm which brought the huge flocks of Snow Geese to the Lochsa Cañon, six swans were seen between the mouths of Fish and Sherman creeks on October 28, 1925. While no specimens were taken, the scarcity of *buccinator* makes it appear unlikely that the birds seen were of this species. Specimens examined in near-by localities during the same period all proved to be *columbianus*.

**Botaurus lentiginosus.** American Bittern. One noted on the Lochsa at the mouth of Weir Creek on September 6, 1923, and one at Long Lake August 22, 1929.

Referring to the Lochsa drainage as a whole, of the thirty-one species listed, but two, the American Merganser and the Spotted Sandpiper, can be called common breeders. Three others, the Eared Grebe, Green-winged Teal and Mallard, are common enough as migrants to be expected each year, while a total of four others might be termed irregularly common migrants though they are sometimes totally absent. These are the Loon, Baldpate, Lesser Scaup and Western Solitary Sandpiper. As for the other twenty-two species, they are all of unusual enough occurrence to mark as red-letter days those on which they are seen, and thus they contribute to the interest of a region which is naturally rich in land bird-life.

*U. S. Forest Service, Avery, Idaho, September 21, 1931.*