

FIELD NOTES

AN EXPERIENCE WITH A FLORIDA GALLINULE.

On or about the twelfth of last May I heard of a strange bird that was in a certain grocery store window. Being naturally curious I thought I would stop in and see it. The grocer was not acquainted with the bird and was not able to find any more definite name for it than that it was a green legged snipe. I myself had never seen a gallinule but I knew at first glance that it belonged to the same family as the coot, which bird I was quite familiar with in some of his northern Iowa breeding grounds.

I got out my Chapmans and Reed's and easily placed him with his proper name. This incident occurred in Des Moines, Ia. The breeding ground of the gallinule is in Minnesota and the Dakotas. This particular species, the Florida gallinule, is never found in this territory except on its yearly migrations.

The bird was found tangled up in some barb wire fence about a mile from a river in a more or less populated portion of the city. My assumption is that the bird in flying strayed a little lower than its comrades and thus met its fate. It had the characteristic slate color of the family, the legs were a bright green with a reddish tinge on the upper part of the femur, the bill and nose plate were red, except for about one-half an inch of yellow on the tip of the bill. This latter point or characteristic was probably an anomaly. This is true of the Purple gallinule but not of the Florida. The serrated edging of white along the lower margin of the wings, together with the reddish upper femur, distinguished it as the Florida rather than the Purple, which it so closely resembles. I have found these differences and variations in the color of the mandibles of water birds to be quite common.

The fact that these birds fly at night, and being as they are by nature weak flyers, probably accounts for the strange situation in which he was found.

I paid the sum of fifty cents for the bird, took it to the zoology department at Drake University, where we caged it and kept it under observation while it recovered from its unusual experience.

At first he was very tame and made no fuss at being handled, but soon he became restless and it became a problem what to do with his Floridaship. The bird thrived on angle worms but ate cracked corn when there was nothing better.

When school closed the tenth of June, I carried him in a yeast foam box a distance of about two hundred miles north to the Iowa City Lakeside Laboratory at Lake Okoboji. Here I tethered him out on the shore by a string about twenty feet long. He seemed quite content with his

lot and spent his time feeding amongst the seaweed and drift on the water's edge. There were a number of Scaup ducks nesting in the vicinity who manifested considerable curiosity and decoyed to within a few yards of a number of us who were working on the shore. They seemed not to understand why their friend was so reckless. At night I often found them together.

And now I come to the end of my gallinule's experience. One night a strong wind came up from the northwest, the little box that had served as a shelter was blown away and the next morning I found him beating against the shore dead. I examined his wing and found one of the wing tips to have been injured in a way that would have left him unable to ever again fly for any distance.

I have since found this summer that the gallinule nests here in northern Iowa, and after watching the flight of the bird I figured that the accident to the bird was a very natural one. Their flight while rapid is very low, especially is this true when flying over water.

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MINIATURE EARTHQUAKE.

A few days ago, while cutting the upper limbs off a large burr oak tree, we barely missed wrecking a whole family of wrens. On one of the lower branches was a small bird house, in which a pair of wrens were nesting. They seemed not to mind the noise of a couple of saws grinding away above them but went on, totally oblivious of noise, feeding the young and taking turns singing from the roof of their little domicile.

All went well until an accident occurred, as accidents so often do. The branch that we had figured on falling a certain way naturally fell the other way; the bird house was heaved from its bearings, spun through the air some twenty feet, coming to the ground with a thud.

I ran over to it, lifted the bottom off, pulled out the twigs which formed the nest, being careful not to spoil the pocket of the nest. There were six young, barely a week old; they were not active enough to tell whether they had been injured or not. The old bird who was with them acted as though she had taken her last flight and was ready to give up the fort. When she saw the crowd around her she essayed to fly, but her head was evidently still whirling in such a way that she could not balance. I placed her back on the nest, put the nest back in the house and put the house on a porch roof some thirty feet away at about the same height from the ground.

The mate to the injured one soon came back with a grub in its mouth, hopped all around the old nest site for some five minutes, then suddenly he recognized the house, which, by the way, he was within three feet of several times, for in his excited flying he would land on the edge of the porch where he had been accustomed without seeing anything, but sitting at the old nest site he recognized his old home and without further