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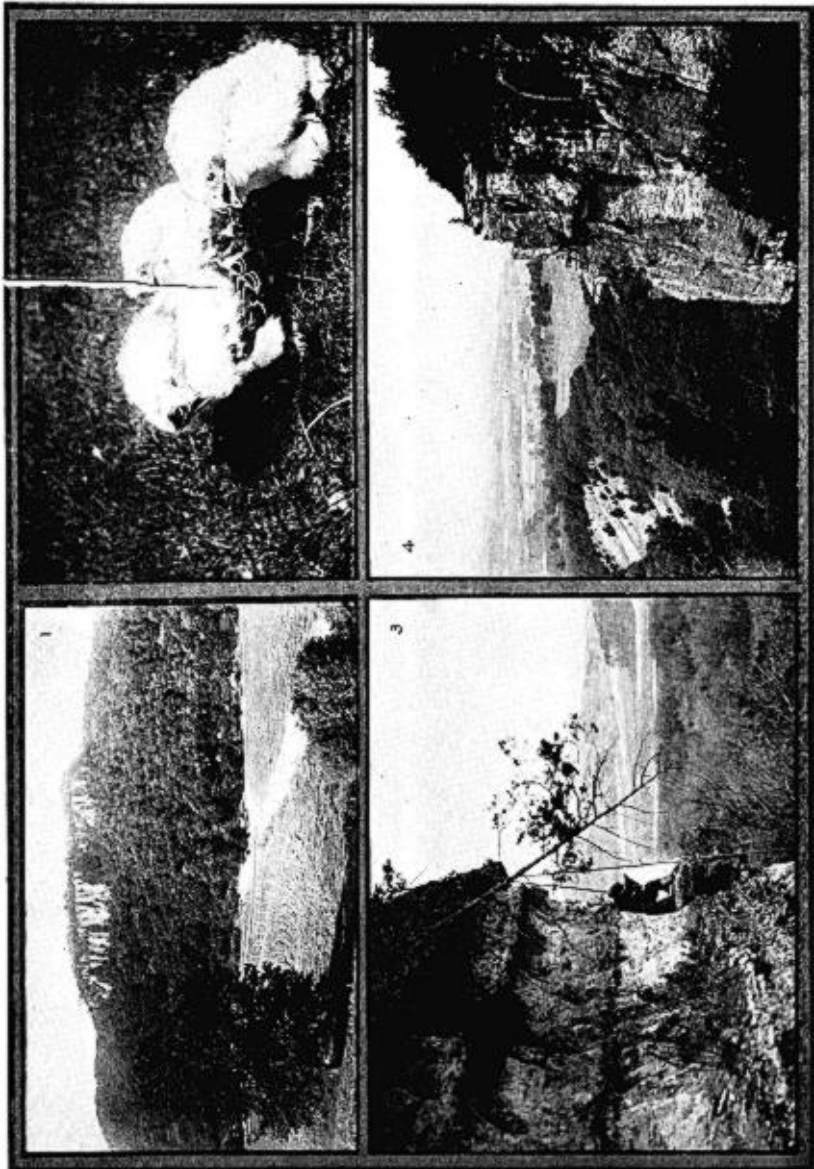
THE NESTING OF THE DUCK HAWK IN SOUTH-CENTRAL WISCONSIN

BY H. L. STODDARD

This splendid falcon (*Falco peregrinus anatum*) is in many respects the most spectacular and thrilling of all our birds, and is as interesting to present-day bird lovers and ornithologists as to the royal falconers of old— for our bird is practically identical with the Peregrine of Europe. By many this bold hunter is considered the nearest approach to the ideal bird from a physical standpoint of any living species, combining beauty, marvelous speed and wing control, with great strength, courage and audacity. The nature of its haunts and eyrie too are in perfect accord. Some of our grandest scenery may be viewed from the ledges where its young are hatched, far up on the face of a rocky precipice. Coming into the world on the slightly sanded rock, without a trace of a nest, and partaking daily of the fresh meat of cleanly killed birds, they have indeed a fitting start for the life to follow.

In regions otherwise suitable, but lacking cliffs, they have been known to nest in the hollow ends of broken-off limbs in lofty trees. As a rule, however, they are so partial to a rocky precipice near a sizable body of water, that the most likely nesting places may be located by a careful study of the Government Topographical Sheets in any well mapped state. And, as ideal nesting locations are few and far between, so also are nesting records in the eastern half of our country.

Comparatively little is known about the nesting of this magnificent falcon in Wisconsin. Kumlein and Hollister



(Birds of Wisconsin, p. 66) give the following information: "Formerly bred at Racine, and has been known to remain at Lake Koshkonong through the summer. . . . We have seen it in summer along the south shore of Lake Superior, where it appeared to be nesting on the rocky ledges."

My own field work has fortunately included some interesting experiences with the Duck Hawk in Wisconsin and the following notes are offered:

On May 20, 1911, an adult female, one addled egg and one downy young, were collected about eight miles below Prairie du Sac, on the Sauk county side of the Wisconsin River, by Mr. Bert Laws and the writer (see *Auk*, Jan. 1917, p. 64-65). Here for over a mile the sandstone bluffs, forming the western boundary of Sauk Prairie, abut on the river, the perpendicular, beautifully modeled rock faces furnishing an ideal nesting environment for this species. Mr. Laws states that they have nested on one or another of these cliffs for over twenty-five years to his knowledge. Early this spring (1921) he noted a pair frequenting the most easterly of these cliffs, known as Ferry Bluff, almost directly across the river from his home. On April 13th, in a pouring rain, we succeeded in locating their three eggs on a ledge having a northeast exposure, overlooking a big slough and miles of heavy river timber. The female sat very closely, only betraying the location of her treasures when a stone thrown from below, landed on the ledge beside her. A well "white-washed" hole near the top of the cliff, a short distance from the nesting ledge, was the regular roost of the male, and here he sat, framed by the circular opening, when we first approached.

As may be seen by the accompanying photograph (Fig. 1), the ledge was perfectly protected from predatory animals, and we ourselves could only reach it with the aid of ropes from above. Fortunately, however, we could see the eggs from the top of a tall basswood tree that grew out from a loam-covered rock mass well up the cliff.

This pair were quite undemonstrative, though the male would occasionally dart by at tremendous speed while one

was on the nesting ledge. Both birds circled nearby, keeping up their harsh, rasping call, somewhat like the alarm "quack" of a mallard hen, many times magnified. On May 15th, after Mr. W. D. Richardson of Chicago, was through photographing them, the one addled egg and two newly hatched young (one of which had been crushed, probably by the parent) were collected, as well as the adult male, the female being purposely spared in hopes she would again nest in the neighborhood. As is usually the case she was a great deal larger, and appeared to be somewhat slower than her trim, equally handsome mate. The frequency with which addled eggs occur and the mortality of the young, seem to be important factors in preventing an undue increase of this rapacious species.

Assuming that incubation had just begun when the eggs were found, April 13th, they were incubated at least thirty-one days.

Remains of the following species of birds were found from time to time on the nesting ledge, or in expelled pellets beneath, Kingfisher (whole head), Domestic Pigeon, Woodcock (hind quarters and bill), Meadowlark, Red-winged Blackbird (numerous), Robin, Bronzed Grackle, Flicker and young chickens.

On May 31st Mr. Albert Gastrow and the writer found another pair nesting in a great cliff, appropriately named Gibraltar Rock, near the town of Okee, in Columbia County, about seventeen miles as the crow flies from the Sauk County locations. Situated in a rich farming country, this impressive bluff rises over four hundred feet above the marsh at its base. The south side has a sheer drop of one hundred and twenty-five feet from the top, crowned with a beautiful grove of pine and cedar, to the steep rock-strewn slope below, which is covered with pine and deciduous trees. Lake Wisconsin lays a mile to the north, with bays cutting in still closer on the east and west, forming the desirable combination of precipice and water.

Here on a short ledge, protected by a shelving rock, were three husky young Duck Hawks, nearly as heavy as their parents, with wing and tail quills just appearing

through their coats of white down. The condition of the young and the nesting site being ideal for our proposed group for the Milwaukee Public Museum, a return trip was made next day, with Mr. George Shrobbree, Chief Taxidermist of the institution, and Mr. E. D. Ochsner of Prairie du Sac, well equipped with ropes and other paraphernalia. Our first move called for the collection of the female, and this pair, whose existence depended on eternal vigilance, were extremely wary and would not come near if they suspected any one was present. They invariably perched upon a commanding point of rock, however, on their trips to and from the nesting ledge. Covering this favored spot with the shotgun, I remained concealed for four hours under a pile of juniper limbs on a nearby ledge before the magnificent bird finally returned and was secured. By this time night was fast approaching so the comparatively easy descent was made to the nesting ledge and the young collected. This spot, so offensive to the nose, pleased the eye, both on account of the beautiful panorama spread below, and the immediate environment. Clumps of flowering Columbine grew on little used parts of the ledge and in nearby crevices, as well as Alumroot, Golden Ragwort and Broad-leafed Panic Grass. Scattered about were remains of Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Green Heron (whole head and neck) and others. For a time nearly a pint of corn and ground feed proved mystifying, till I happened to think of the crops of domestic poultry! The stomach of the female, later examined, contained the remains of three young chickens.

The eyrie was about twenty-five feet from the top and a hundred from the bottom. These young falcons were without exception the most savage youngsters I ever encountered, biting and clawing at every opportunity, and their harsh screams, similar to those of the adult, were deafening at such close quarters. It is interesting to note, however, that they kept perfectly quiet for hours at a time while their parents were absent on hunting forays, but detected their approach at a great distance and screamed lustily.

On returning a few days later to show the site to Messrs. S. Paul Jones and Warner Taylor, Wilson Club members from Madison, we were surprised and delighted to see the male circling over the Rock in company of another mate, perhaps the widow from Ferry Bluff! Though pirates, and pests to the neighboring farmers without doubt, we could not help hoping that these birds, so inspiring to observe, would nest again on picturesque Gibraltar, probably their home for ages.

No opportunity presented itself to investigate a report that Duck Hawks nested in the Devil's Lake region, a scant five miles to the north, where the necessary combination of precipice and water also occurs.

Milwaukee, Wis.

SUMMER BIRDS IN THE VICINITY OF
LAKE CADDO, HARRISON COUNTY,
TEXAS

BY ALVIN R. CAHN

Probably few states in the union can compare with Texas from the point of view of topographic diversity and climatic variations. From the swampy marshes on the gulf coast to the heavily timbered regions, and from the great open, semi-arid plains to the mountainous regions of the trans-Pecos country, there extends practically every possible type of environment one could hope to find within any single state. Such diversity of conditions would lead even the uninitiated to suspect a large biota in point of number of species, and such a suspicion is most certainly verified in fact. Coupled with this environmental diversity is the fact that Texas lies at the focal point of many of the routes taken by our migratory birds, so that it is not surprising that this state should head the avifaunal list with 546 species within its borders. Within this area of 265,780 square miles the species of the east meet many of those of the west, and a certain amount of over-lapping occurs.