

Rail carrying young. It seems that he, with several others, was at Procher's Bluff, South Carolina, during a time of high tide. As they were watching young rails drifting by on the usual drift trash, he noticed an adult rail swimming with something in its bill. Through the binoculars he could see that the bird was carrying a young chick in such a manner that its head was under water. As he watched she stopped, shifted the burden so the young would not drown, swam to the raft of drift, dumped the chick onto it, and clambered up herself.

When one considers the reputation of the observers, the fact that the behavior has been seen in several species, and the number of times it has been reported, it is hard to escape the conclusion that this is a well developed and *purposeful* method of removing the very young bird from a zone of danger. Yet, with the knowledge that the intelligence in the shore bird group is not on a very high plane, I wish someone might furnish a better explanation of the phenomenon and its origin. That it exists we can not well doubt, nor can we well believe it accidental when repeated time after time.—IVAN R. TOMKINS, *U. S. Dredge Welatka, Savannah, Ga.*

**Melanism in the American Rough-legged Hawk.**—The winter of 1936-37 in southeastern South Dakota was one of unusually deep snow. Highways were blocked for days and the prairies were covered early with a blanket of snow that ever increased in depth as the season advanced. The American Rough-legged Hawk (*Buteo lagopus s. johannis*) was abundant, probably forced south in more than usual numbers by the deep snow and severe blizzards which likely made it difficult to procure sufficient food in its northern range.

As the roads were cleared of snow after each new storm, large flocks of Horned Larks (*Otocoris alpestris* subsp.), Lapland Longspurs (*Calcarius lapponicus*), and Ring-necked Pheasants (*Phasianus colchicus torquatus*) were attracted to the graveled highways. Many of these birds were killed each day by the passing cars and furnished a continual banquet for the Crows (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), in which they were quite frequently joined by the Rough-legged Hawks.

I spent five days a week all winter long traveling this territory and I doubt if a single day passed that I did not see at least one Rough-legged Hawk. Usually I saw many each day and I was especially interested in their great variety of plumage, which ranges from the pure black that give the "Rough-leg" the name of "Black Hawk" throughout the middlewest, to birds of such light plumage that they might easily be mistaken for the Ferruginous Rough-leg (*Buteo regalis*) by the incautious observer. Melanism in the American Rough-legged Hawk is so common as to excite little interest under ordinary circumstances and I had given this phase no more than ordinary attention until an incident occurred which brought it to my notice more forcefully.

On January 29, 1937, in McCook County, south of Montrose, South Dakota, while driving along the highway I noticed two large hawks some distance ahead of me. One of them was perched on a telephone pole and the other had lit in the snow near by. I was able to drive within twenty yards of them and take out my glasses before they took wing. They were identical, no single feature of either size or plumage differed in any respect. Both hawks were black except the under surface of the distal third of each wing. They took wing and flew across the road in front of me, turned and came back low and almost directly overhead. Their markings were unusual even for the Rough-leg and the fact that they were

alike was, to me, very extraordinary. I made a sketch of the under-surface of this hawk, which is shown in Figure 17A. I had been keeping a list, as was my custom, but had not been keeping the melanistic individuals separate from the regular type, except in one instance. On January 11, 1937, two miles southeast of Kaylor, S. D., I saw my first completely black hawk. This bird was not the glossy black of the crow but was of a dull black or very dark brown. It was entirely without light markings of any kind. It was unsuspecting and allowed me to approach to within a short distance. It was an American Rough-legged Hawk, without question.

I now started keeping a record of this phase and in the short series I was able to make, found that about one bird in five differed in some degree from the normal plumage. I am considering as normal the plumage shown by Walter A. Weber on page 330, Volume I, of "The Birds of Minnesota", by Dr. Thomas S. Roberts. This plumage is shown in Figure 17D.

In the sketches shown here I have copied the outline from Weber and filled in the dark and light areas from the drawings in my notebook made at the time of observation.

The bird shown in Figure 17B was seen on February 4, 1937, two miles north of Alexandria, South Dakota; that of Figure 17C was seen on the same date one quarter mile west of Stanley Corner in McCook County, South Dakota.

Aside from those that are shown here, birds were seen in almost every intermediate degree of light and dark coloring.

The fact that the two hawks seen on January 29 were alike makes me wonder if the dark and light phases might not be inherited. I would be at a loss to know how to explain these identically marked dark hawks unless they were from the same brood.—BRUCE F. STILES, *Sioux City, Iowa.*

**The Herring Gull Colony at Bridge Lake, British Columbia.**—A description of the most southerly nesting so far located in British Columbia of the Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) was published by me in the Condor (XXXVII, July, 1935, pp. 214-215). When this colony was next visited two years later, on June 24, 1935, it was observed that the number of birds had increased from thirty-four adults in 1933 to thirty-eight adults in 1935. This had happened in spite of the fact that less nesting accommodation was available, owing to a rise in the lake levels which had reduced the island's area by one-third.

There were seventeen nests composed chiefly of twigs and moss—one contained a few green poplar leaves, several pieces of green grass, and a twig of Douglas fir with green leaves attached. Ten nests contained eggs (four singles, three of three, and three of two); five contained eggs and downy young (in two cases two eggs and one young; in three cases one egg and one young); two nests were empty.

The stomachs of two downy young contained larvae of a predaceous diving beetle (*Dytiscus* sp.) as the chief item. In one case thirty, in the other eight had been eaten. A few of these larvae, which remained sufficiently whole to be measured, were one and a half to two inches long, and the remainder, represented chiefly by jaws, were thought to be approximately the same size. Unidentified fish remains, beetle fragments, and vegetable debris, including a *Polygonum* seed, were minor items totaling 5 per cent of the contents in each case. The stomach of a third specimen held fragments of several small Salmonidae, 95 per cent,