

It proved to be situated just like the other one and contained five beautiful eggs. I got the nest out with some difficulty, as it was held to the bank by many small roots. The cavity in which the nest was made is lined overhead with moss, making a roof for the nest."

Upon receiving the nest and eggs from Mr. Taylor I found the eggs addled and the bird had doubtless been sitting upon them for some time in vain; otherwise this nesting date would be unusually late and the site of the nest an unusual one. The prospect hole in which the nest was found was on a hillside fully exposed to the sun and very dry, which seems quite in contrast to the usual habitat of this Wren.

---

## SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE ANATIDÆ OF NORTH DAKOTA.

BY REV. HERBERT K. JOB.

It was my privilege in the spring of 1898 to enjoy a collecting trip in North Dakota that covered nearly the whole nesting period,—from May 6 to July 4. With a companion, 'rig,' and camp outfit I made a 600 mile tour, visiting most of the principal lakes in the northern half of the State, as far west as into the Turtle Mountains. Paying especial attention to the Ducks, I had an unusual opportunity to note the distribution of the different species throughout the broad region that I traversed. Fourteen species were found nesting, namely,—Mallard, Gadwall, Baldpate, Green-winged Teal, Blue-winged Teal, Shoveller, Pintail, Redhead, Canvas-back, Lesser Scaup, Ring-neck, American Golden-eye, White-winged Scoter, and Ruddy Duck.

As nearly all the land in the region visited has been, or is being, taken up by settlers, the Anatidæ are on the wane in the breeding season, according to all accounts. Yet I was surprised at



their abundance and general distribution. I visited five or six different localities, aside from Devil's Lake, where the Canada Goose still breeds, and found several nests. A few Swans are yet reported by residents around Devil's Lake during the nesting season. Reports of their nesting in or near the Turtle Mountain country I failed to verify, though I think they have done so in recent years, and a few may yet, further west than I went.

I should classify the Ducks as to their occurrence in the breeding season in the following groups:—

1. *Abundant*:—Blue-winged Teal, Shoveller, Mallard, and Pin-tail. These were seen in nearly every puddle large enough for a Duck to swim in, as well as in all larger bodies of water.

2. *Common*:—Gadwall, Baldpate, Red-head, and Lesser Scaup. These were found about most of the larger sloughs and lakes, and many of the smaller.

3. *Locally common*:—Canvas-back, Ruddy, American Golden-eye, and White-winged Scoter,—the latter only in the Devil's Lake region.

4. *Rare*:—Green-winged Teal, Greater Scaup, Ring-neck, Wood Duck, and Hooded Merganser.

The Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) I did not meet on this trip, but in 1890, about the first of June, I came close upon a pair swimming in the Sheyenne River. The Wood Duck I noted but once,—a male, in the Goose River. I did not find the Buffle-head.

The only specimen of the Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya affinis*) was encountered in the Turtle Mountains, on June 14, when I was so fortunate as to start a female from her nest. It was in a reedy, boggy bayou, or arm of a lake, which was full of Bitterns, Black Terns, and Bronzed, Red-winged, and Yellow-headed Blackbirds. I was on my way out to photograph a Bittern's nest already found, and was struggling along more than up to my knees in mud and water, when a smallish Duck flushed almost at my feet from some thick, dead rushes, disclosing twelve buffy eggs, nearly fresh. The clear view within a yard of the pearl gray speculum and the total absence of white on the wing told the story. She alighted near by in open water, and gave me and my companion such fine opportunity to study her with the glass



and note every detail of her plumage, both as she sat and as she flew back and forth before us, that it was not necessary to sacrifice her for identification. Nothing was seen of the male.

I met the Green-winged Teal (*Nettion carolinensis*) on two occasions. The first time was in Steele County on May 11, when I came upon a pair sitting with some of the other Teal, Shovelers, and Pintails in a small pond close to a farm-house. The other instance was on June 20, at Rolla, near the Turtle Mountains, when, investigating a small, reedy prairie-slough, I came upon a female manifesting great anxiety, and soon drove from the tall reeds her brood of eight young. For a quarter of an hour that mother flapped, limped, and dragged herself around, at times so close to me that I could almost touch her. The ducklings were of very tender age.

The Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) I am confident of meeting in considerable numbers in one large reedy slough not far from Devil's Lake, both in May and towards the end of June. The Lesser Scaup was there too, and I could not but notice the difference in size between them. My last visit, at the breeding time, had to be very brief, and I did not happen upon any nest. In this one slough were ten species of Ducks, all in good numbers. The place was fairly alive with Ducks, as were many other similar localities that I came across in my travels.

The White-winged Scoter (*Oidemia deglandi*) I found quite common in two localities in the Devil's Lake region. During the first part of the season I searched in vain for nests. But on June 27 I solved the mystery by finding eight nests on a group of small islands. They contained 14, 13, 10, 10, 7, 6, 1, 0, eggs respectively. The last was a new nest ready for eggs. This shows that the bird is a very late breeder. In only three instances was the bird on the nest, — the first three mentioned. The eggs were all fresh, in the other instances being cold, covered with down, debris, and loam that had been scratched over them. The nest is the flimsiest built by any species of Duck that I have observed, — a mere depression in the bare earth, with a frail rim of dark down, weed-stems, and grass around it. The eggs are of a pinkish flesh-color, even after being blown. In every case the nest was under a clump of bushes, with woody stems, never in



weeds or grass. Six were under wild rose bushes, two under a common bush, of which I do not know the scientific name. The females found on the nests sat very close.

On these islands the same day I found about twenty nests each of the Baldpate and Lesser Scaup, built in clumps of grass or weeds, but not one under bushes. I shot several of the Scaups, but they were all *affinis*. Full sets of each varied from six to twelve, those of nine and ten being the commonest. The Baldpates' eggs were nearly all perfectly fresh, some sets incomplete. Most of the Scaup sets were moderately incubated, some of them considerably, though some, too, were fresh.

The American Golden-eye (*Clangula clangula americana*) is found breeding in small colonies in various patches of timber in the region of Devil's Lake. I also saw a few males in the Turtle Mountains, but did not find any nests. Sets of this species were completed from about May 20 to the first of June this year. In one colony most of the sets hatched from June 20 to 25. It was a beautiful sight to peer into a hollow tree and see a female with her newly hatched black and white ducklings. The little things were not afraid, but would patter about in the hollow, picking at something, or climb up on the back of their frightened parent, who would not attempt to fly out, but lie over on her side, look up, and hiss at the intruder. The next day the whole family would be gone.

The Ruddy Duck (*Erismatura jamaicensis*) and Canvas-back (*Aythya vallisneria*) were rather sparingly distributed, a few pairs to a slough or lake here and there. Where one was seen, the other was likely to be found. In one slough which I visited on May 21 I noticed numerous Ruddies in pairs swimming among the reeds, and out in the middle in open lanes of water I counted eleven pairs of Canvas-back, scattered here and there, and one lone male, whose partner had evidently begun her long vigil. I found eggs of the latter species slightly incubated on May 18 and June 18, and on June 28 saw a female with a brood of small young.

In regard to nesting dates of the different species, while there is, of course, a general average time at which each tends to breed, individuals are more or less erratic. Some Mallards, for example,



begin incubation early in May, but many wait until early or even middle June. I found nearly fresh sets of the Red-head in the first days of June, and two large fresh sets, on which incubation had not commenced, on the 28th of that month. My season's experience would indicate that the Mallard, Pintail, and Gadwall are, on the whole, the earliest breeders, a fair proportion, at least, beginning incubation by May 20. The Golden-eye, too, belongs among the early breeders. Most of the other species are fairly at work during the first week or ten days of June. The Scaups follow about June 15 to 20, the procession ending with the Baldpates and Scoters the last of June and first of July. This estimate is based solely on my observations of the season of 1898, and may not represent other years. The weather was very cold and wet all through. It seemed as though many of the Ducks of all species would never settle down to breeding. Hundreds and hundreds of all kinds remained paired up to the middle of June.

The laying of different species in each others' nests was interesting. I found Red-head's eggs in a Canvas-back's nest, Ruddy's eggs twice in Red-head's, Lesser Scaup's in a Shoveller's and what I took to be Shoveller's eggs in the nest of a Baldpate.

I did not notice any special localization of the species in the regions visited, except of Scoters and Golden-eyes, which has already been described. The other species were found everywhere in the same comparative abundance wherever the conditions as to water were suited to their habits. All Ducks were scarce in the older settled country in the extreme eastern part of the State, at least in those parts of it I visited. Few also were found along the rivers, as compared with the prairie lakes and sloughs. Despite glowing accounts of the abundance of Ducks in the Turtle Mountain lakes, I found them almost entirely absent, meeting only scattered individuals. The country is all timbered, and the stony shores of the lakes offer few good nesting sites. The collector will find the typical species there to be the Loon, Holboell's Grebe, Bittern, Red-tailed Hawk, Sapsucker, Purple Martin, and various interesting, as well as rare, small birds.



Job, Herbert Keightley. 1899. "Some Observations on the Anatidæ of North Dakota." *The Auk* 16, 161–165. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4069549>.

**View This Item Online:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/54100>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.2307/4069549>

**Permalink:** <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/88933>

#### **Holding Institution**

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

#### **Sponsored by**

Smithsonian

#### **Copyright & Reuse**

Copyright Status: Public domain. The BHL considers that this work is no longer under copyright protection.

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.