

Canadian Natural History.

The Great Northern Diver.

(Colymbus glacialis.)

The accompanying illustration represents the bird last mentioned in our account, which will be found elsewhere, of the collection sent by Canada to the Paris Exhibition,—the Great Northern Diver, which, on account of its size and beautiful markings, at once attracts attention in the group to which it belongs. The head of the adult bird is black glossed with green and purple, and the cheeks and back of the neck are black without the green gloss. The back is black variegated with short white streaks, lengthening towards the breast, and the neck and upper part of the breast are white spotted with black, and encircled with two collars of deep black. The breast and abdomen are white. The total length of the bird is not quite three feet. The immature bird is greyish black above, each feather being edged with a lighter hue and the under parts of the body are dull white. In some places this bird is called the Loon.

In its native haunts this splendid diver may be seen pursuing its arrowy course through and over the water, occasionally dashing through the air, but very seldom taking to the shore, when it is quite at a disadvantage.

Perhaps there is no bird that excels the Northern Diver in its subaqueous powers, although the penguins and cormorants are eminently notable in that respect. Its broad webbed feet are set so far back that it cannot walk properly, but tumbles and scrambles along much after the fashion of a seal, pushing itself with its feet, and scraping its breast along the ground. In the water, however, it is quite at its ease, and, like the seal, no sooner reaches the familiar element, than it dives away at full speed, twisting and turning under the surface as if in the exuberance of happy spirits. So swiftly can it glide through the water that it can chase and capture the agile fish in their own element, thus exhibiting another curious link in the interchanging capacities of various beings; the bats, for example, surpassing many birds in airy flight; the cursorial birds running faster than most quadrupeds, the seals and others equalling the fish in their own watery domain, and some of the fish, again, being able to pass for a considerable distance through the air. But among birds, it is generally admitted, the aquatic powers of the Great Northern Diver are unrivalled. Something of mystery, too, has always attached to this race-horse of the sea. For centuries it was thought impossible to track it to its nest, and the wildest stories were current respecting its origin and habits. Naturalists are now, however, more familiar with its haunts, and it is ascertained that it retires to high latitudes to breed, where it lays from two to three eggs on the margin of some lake or stream—the nest, a very large one, frequently floating among reeds upon the water.

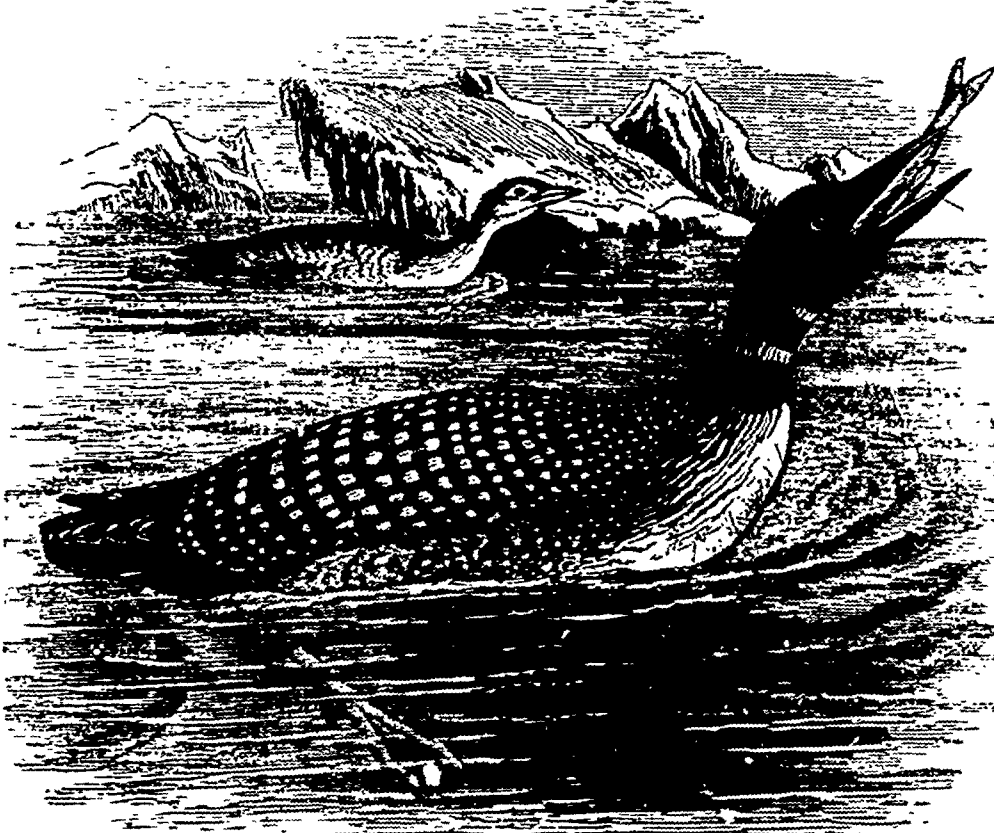
Though this bird never uses its wings to escape

from pursuit, he is by no means incapable of flight; but in flying he sometimes gets into scrapes from which he cannot easily extricate himself. A writer in the (English) *Journal of Agriculture* gives the following amusing instance:—A friend in Shetland, requiring to be awake at an early hour, had just replied to the knock of a domestic, when a sudden yell from the caller effectually banished his slumbers. "The devil is here in the dark," roared the girl, "and his claws are in my leg." A bewildered diver had found his way into the house, and had thus intimated his presence to the unlucky maid-servant. Another specimen of the diver was caught in a hollow in a moor, from which it was unable to rise. It was placed in an enclosure where two sea eagles were confined, but the royal birds objected to the intrusion. The male eagle dashed at the new-comer without a moment's delay, but the diver received the on-

among them. Instantly the flock disappeared; but two were wounded, one of which remained floating, and apparently dead. We had almost grasped it when, with a sudden effort, it revived and dived like its fellows. It rose before the gun was reloaded, and two stout rowers, pulling with a will, gave chase; but at every rise above the surface the bird, sorely wounded as it was, increased its distance, and finally left us far behind." Other writers relate similar narratives of the extreme difficulty of capturing or shooting this bird, on account of the marvellous rapidity of its course through the water.

ARTIFICIAL BIRDS' NESTS.—The societies formed for the protection of insectivorous birds in Switzerland are now setting up artificial nests. One of the members of a society of this description who inhabits Porey, having observed that many species of that

kind select for nests the holes they find in the branches of rotten trees and that they consequently do not find it easy to settle in orchards, where all the trees are in good condition, began, twenty five years ago, to set up rotten trunks in his grounds, and since then he has had no need to trouble himself in the least about clearing away caterpillars, that care being entirely left to the birds who perform their duty admirably. His neighbours, on the contrary who have not had this foresight, have had their orchards laid waste by insects. The Yvardum Society have gone the length of placing artificial nests in the public walks and communal forests, on the borders of the lawns, &c. All those nests are now inhabited by hedge sparrows, redstarts, creepers, and tomfits, all which may be found in Switzerland as high up as the perpetual



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set with its bayonet like bill, exactly as a foot soldier would meet the charge of a dragoon. Baffled and bleeding, the eagle, after repeated failures, retired from the contest. Meanwhile his mate had watched the progress of the combat with gathering wrath, erected feathers, and glaring eye, and when she saw the final defeat of her lord, sprang from her perch, avoided the diver's beak, and with one grasp of her talons round his neck laid him dead at her feet.

In winter, the Northern Diver is not gregarious, but in autumn they are often collected in little troops, when they utter a continuous chant, which sounds most musically along the waters. "We shall not forget," says the writer already alluded to, "the surprise we felt when that plaintive bell-like sound first struck our ear. We were becalmed in a yacht, when all at once we seemed to hear the distant tinkling chimes of a pack of beagles. At length the telescope discovered the source of the sound in a group of these birds far off towards the shore. Anxious to obtain a specimen as well as a closer view, we dropped down upon them in a small boat, and by various manoeuvres succeeded in approaching them pretty closely. The glass showed their eyes suspiciously watching us as they slowly edged away, though not absolutely taking alarm. At length we thought we were within range of a large duck gun, and sent a cartridge

snow line. The same practice has found its way into Germany.—*Ex.*

Crows vs. Insects.

MR. J. A. ALLEN, in his "Winter Notes of an Ornithologist," published in the first number of the *American Naturalist*—a new popular magazine that we heartily welcome—gives a good word for the crow. "The poor crow," he states, "despised or persecuted by nearly all, is a bird of unusual interest to every lover of nature, and is a true friend to the farmer, though he finds in the latter a most inveterate enemy. The few crows that remain with us during the cold winter, seem able to support but a miserable existence, but no sooner does returning spring and the bare earth afford them a supply of grubs and other noxious insect larvae, than they fare liberally, and their labours thus contribute vastly to the welfare of the farmer. Capable of withstanding the deforesting of the country, which has exterminated so many of our larger birds, he needs but little encouragement to become one of our most familiar and useful birds."

A Missouri farmer being asked if raising hemp was a good business, answered, "I can't sartin say, but it is surely better than being raised by it."