

BIRD STUDY FROM A DUCK-BLIND.

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A day's tramp in the hills usually has for an objective, a lake or slough, or a mountain-top to reach before turning homeward and after a few hours' travel, this becomes the dominant idea. One cannot sit down to watch a bird for any length of time, as the lake or slough of one's destination urges haste. One obeys the impulse and passes on, losing, it may be, a chance of learning some secret of avian psychology.

But when hidden behind a screen of brush or rushes on some pleasant lake shore, the mental attitude is that of expectancy and curiosity only. To become an inconspicuous part of the blind, that screens us from the sharp eyes of passing waterfowl, is now the object. One's predatory instincts counsel immobility and silence, so there is no impulse to move and one has the maximum of opportunity for observation. While following the flight of a bird until it is lost to view or watching with close attention, the numerous waterfowl that swim past the blind or feed within the range of binoculars, the gun is frequently forgotten. The band of scaups that swim past the blind, leaning against the breezes at an angle that reveals their white underparts and then fly straight out over the lake, until, a row of vanishing dots, they melt into the horizon, have appealed to other than the sportsman's eye. The impulse is to watch rather than shoot; the carefully built blind and the decoys swinging at their anchors to leeward have served the bird lover rather than the sportsman.

October in the Okanagan is a month of golden cloudless days and starlit nights. To-day, the 7th (1918) the lake is unruffled by the slightest breeze and on the glassy surface, there is a perfect unblurred replica of the surrounding hills. There is no frost, but the early morning air is keen and one's fingers grow numb grasping the canoe-paddle. This intimation of the cold days to come is forgotten when the first shafts of sunlight cut through the belt of firs on the mountain-top. As the sun rises higher, bathing the western hills in a flood of golden light, that creeps lower and lower until every tree stands out in relief, and as the mist-wraiths over the water are drawn up and dissipated, one can see little evidence of autumn, save the bold splashes of yellow along the shore-line where the cottonwoods are turning.

The blind is built on the edge of a narrow sandy beach, close to the mouth of a small creek that pursues its indolent course through a wide valley of farm land and brush to the north. One hun-

dred yards from the water, where the beach merges into the meadow, there is a thicket of deciduous trees, poplar, birch, alder and willow. From this shelter come the voices of a few late migrants; the faintly heard "chirp" from the last of the Audubon's Warblers and the stronger, more metallic calls from a band of Gambel Sparrows.

The lake is dotted with grebes, Western, Holboell, Horned and Pied-bills. The Horned Grebes are quite fearless; seven swim in among the decoys and alternately dive for food or preen their already immaculate plumage. Alarmed by a gun-shot, they fly, splashing along the surface for thirty or forty yards, when they alight again and huddle in a compact flock, as if for protection. In a few minutes they paddle back to rest among the decoys. Their plumage seems to be in need of constant attention; when not feeding, they are usually oiling and combing their feathers, sometimes lying on the side, one foot above the surface and bill buried in the glistening breast.

The other small species, the Pied-bill, which is much less common here, does not visit the decoys. They are more easily alarmed than the Horned Grebe, and at a sudden movement sink below the surface until only head and neck are visible, then with a rapid look to either side disappear, leaving scarcely a ripple.

The two larger species are much more wary and keep some distance out from the shore. The Western Grebe with its long slender neck and hair-like plumage, suggest reptilian ancestry more than do the other species. Paddling towards one is an interesting experience. Before being alarmed they float high on the water, conspicuously black and white; as the canoe draws near, they turn and swim straight away, showing only the black upper parts which blend with the dark water. The head is carried stiffly erect on the long straight neck and there are frequent quick glances backward. A few yards nearer and they dive with a quick clean flip. Many of these birds are suffering from a wasting disease, probably due to the presence of intestinal parasites in large numbers. The actions of the sick birds identify them at once. They swim slowly close to the shore as a rule and dive only when actively pursued, to arise exhausted within a few yards.

In the presence of their handsomer cousins the less conspicuous Holboell receive only a cursory inspection. Those that pass the blind to-day are all juveniles, with dark greyish back, spotted breast