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Wild Ducks.

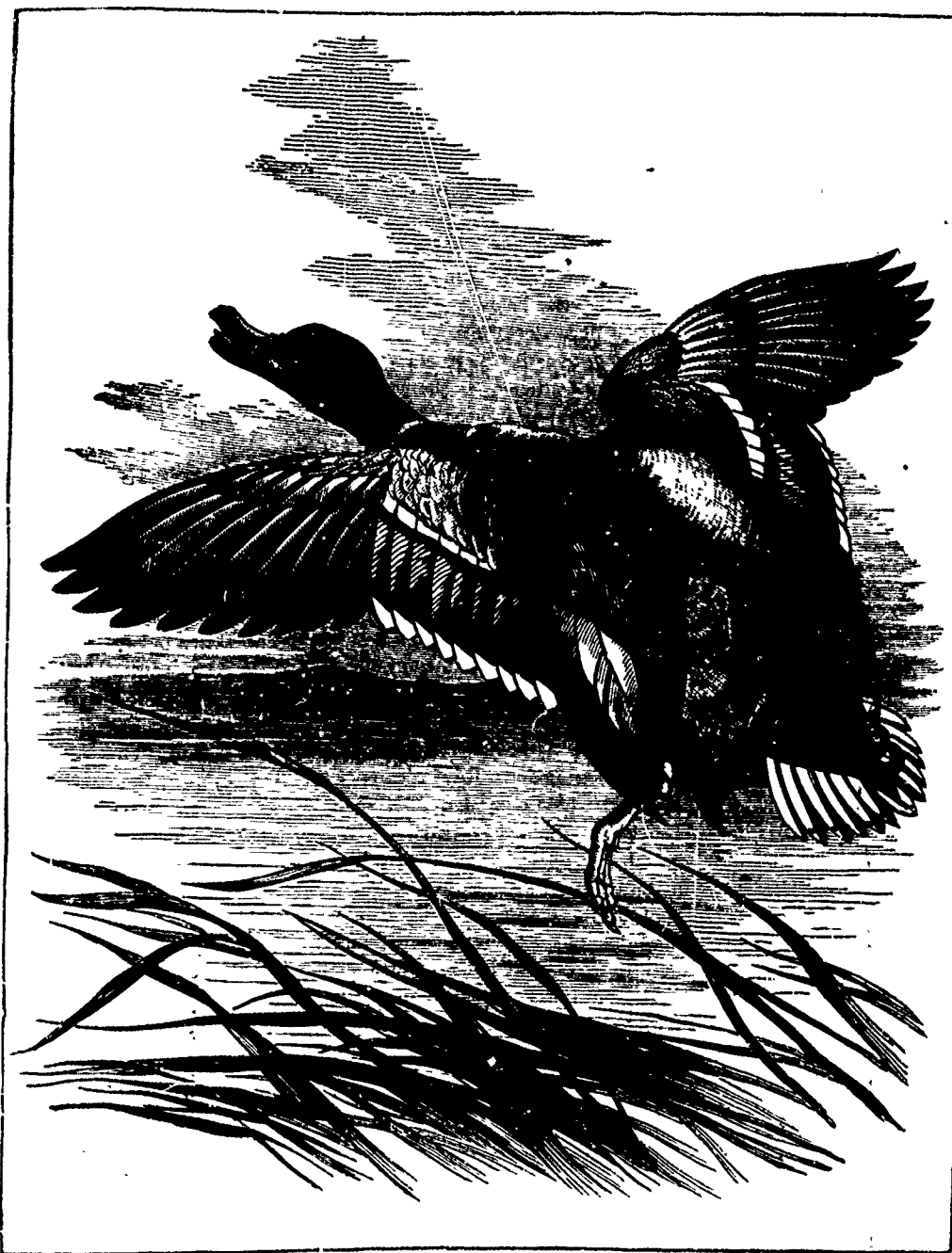
BY ELLA RODMAN CHURCH.

To see a waddling and swimming fowl, like the barnyard duck, spread a good-sized pair of wings and mount up into the air until it became a small speck in the sky, would be a remarkable sight; yet this is just what its cousin—the wild-duck, who is a very “high flyer”—does continually. It can also swim and float, for, like its plainer relative, it belongs to the swan family, and must therefore be at home on the water.

These wild ducks are beautiful birds, and each family of them has its own peculiar style of dress. Thus, the summer or wood duck—which is the handsomest of all the species—appears in the most gorgeous colouring, with softly-shaded tints, and it moves so gracefully that it seems more like a swan than a duck. It is called the summer duck because it is the only one of its tribe that is seen here during the summer months; and because its eggs are usually laid in a hollow tree or stump, it is also called the wood duck.

The nest is carefully hidden under grasses and water ferns; and both parents are very watchful that no harm shall come to the precious eggs. The mother-bird does not seem to know

what fear is when she is sitting on her eggs; and a naturalist tells a story of a pair of summer ducks which had built their nest in a hollow oak overhanging a creek. Not more than ten feet away from them some workmen were building a boat, and a constant noise and hammering went on from morning till night. In spite of all this confusion the mother-duck would not move from her eggs, and there she stayed until—before the little ducklings appeared—some heartless sportsman shot them both.



WILD DUCKS.

The summer duck is known all over the country, and it usually flies in pairs, or in very small flocks. When it alights it utters a curious, whistling sort of cry, that sounds like “tee eel!” and can be heard at some distance. Strange to say, it prepares its food before eating it by making a mixture of dried snails, acorns, and wild-oat seeds.

The mallard—although it looks more like the common duck—is nearly as handsome as the summer duck, and has a great variety of glowing and

canvas-back; This delightful, but rather stupid duck begins to arrive from the north early in October, and it always comes in great flocks, and is slaughtered in countless numbers. It dearly loves the wild celery, for which it has to dive, as the root—the only part it cares for—grows under water; and the widgeon, another duck that likes celery, is sure to be the companion of the canvas-back.

This widgeon has been described as a “thorough

beautiful colours in its plumage: “The dark emerald of the head, the snowy-white line which encircles the neck, the brownish carmine of the chest, the gold and blue and crimson of the wings, the clear, flashing transparency of the eye—are all beautiful features.”

This duck is a strong flyer, and very suspicious of any near approach. He may sometimes be seen floating on a lake like a swan, with his beautiful, glittering head raised high, and his eyes flashing in the sun. A long distance off, perhaps, there is a man with a gun, but the mallard seems to know it, and to remember the dreadful noise of the report that frightened him so much; so, drawing his feet under his body, he springs upon them, opens his wings, and, with loud “quacks!” takes himself off—as the bird in the picture is doing.

The blue winged teal and the green-winged teal are both beautiful birds. The latter has such soft, beautifully shaded colouring, that it seems to have been laid on with a fine brush. The head is of emerald, streaked with chestnut; the wings of the freshest green, and the back is finely pencilled.