

with cold water—about 45 degrees—and to add to this, the edge of the floating bog let water seep up into the nest. The average man would have given long odds against that youngster ever hatching out alive.

"Sun's up!" called the boy from his bunk; "Oh, do let's hurry and get that loon's picture."



Loons nest and the two eggs of the great Northern Diver in Rice Lake, Ont.

"No hurry, Laddie, I can't snap him until eleven o'clock without pointing the lens dead on to the sun, but you may hurry and get up and get a picture of a boy washing himself in a nice clear, cold lake." (Laddie Jr. looks over my shoulder as I write this and says I take a base advantage of him, as I never tell when I get up late.)

After breakfast and a few lessons we pushed the dear old canoe out, and I took the bow seat.

"We'll fool that wise old loon this morning, Laddie; I'll have both cameras ready, and you will shoot her silently and swiftly right past the wee point and stop in the middle of the bay, and I'll get him sitting and coming."

"Yes, you will," he called unbelievably. Silently we swept down the long bay and silently I shipped my paddle and set the small box camera on top of the big reflex. Silently as a ghost the canoe slid along, as the lad was muffling his strokes by sliding his thumb along the gunwale—one long, swift stroke and we passed the little point that shut in the tiny bay—and there sat the big bird within fifteen feet of us. He had not heard us. Instantly he threw his head forward; out as flat as any snake he lay; the canoe came to a dead stop. "Snap!" sang the "bullet"—down I passed it—up came the reflex: "Clang!" sang the focal plane shutter, just as the great bird leaped in a smother of foam and splashing water and dived beneath us.

"I said you would, didn't I?" laughed the boy.

"Yes, I heard you say it; it's easy, my lad. I don't want to blow my own bugle, but if you had to picture your brant and then shoot it for the pot; or to make it a bit harder, shoot it and then picture it, and find you could do either in the space of one second, you would laugh at using two cameras. We could even set the cameras here and make the loon take its own picture, but I fear risking the machines in this uncertain climate, and we have a full life of the loon in the negative box anyhow."

"Two eggs this time," he answered. Yes, not only had the big birds sheltered the one precious egg, but the female had added the second one, and this makes a full clutch, as we never found more than two eggs in a nest—more often one.

"Look at the old fellow prancing," called the boy. True enough, like a big white animal, the infuriated bird spattered along the surface of the lake on its outspread feet, balancing cleverly on its wings at times, but usually doing wonderful turns with body and neck straight erect and wings tightly folded.

Again they refused to let us get within a canoe's length, so I did not snap them. Another day, and we disturbed about a thousand singing bluebills gravelling on

the island's shore as we passed along—we shot the canoe across the tiny bay. This time the female, sitting far out in the lake had given one low call—I heard it; so did the male—and he slipped off the nest and was away outside us when we peered at the nest—one egg and one downy black youngster. Laddie pushed the canoe close to the nest and fondled the babe, coal black, soft and silky; eyes, down, feet, bill, all inky black, save a white spot on the breast. He lifted the unhatched egg and I snapped him.

It was a glorious sight so see this nest-tired male take to wing. He could not do so if it was dead calm without an intense effort; often defeated; but there was a sweet little May wind blowing, and he started by spattering the water with the tips of his wings and kicking it with his feet. After about fifty yards of this hard work he got his big body clear of the surface and fanned heavily with his wings; another fifty yards and he cleared the lake and rose into the air; then off he went at a good thirty miles an hour for a breather. Much later we saw him coming back—with the wind—fully sixty miles an hour this time. He wanted to settle in a clear place of about a half mile square, and he came about in a great curve with shrieking pinions, and swept back on his own course like a flash of light. Around he went in a full circle, ever lowering, with a noise as of a mighty wind sweeping through the trees. Down, down he comes—right about to the wind he heads again, and strikes the small waves of the lake like a great white ball. Bounce, bounce, bounce—a canoe length each time—then he cuts ahead in a great furrow of white water and stops, shakes his big wings, throws his big iridescent head up, and fills his lungs good and full and says, "A-Loo-oo-o—A-Loo-oo-o." No wonder the boy says, "Oh! some bird that, eh?"

For yet over two weeks the handsome pair sat on that bog edge or swam with the youngsters (for there were two now) alongside, never swimming afar off, as big, snapping turtles and passing hawks and sliding, wriggling black snakes and mighty fish were all hungry for such dainty morsels. Whenever we passed, for we were after other pictures now, the parents called softly to the young and swam off, coaxing them along with calls as sweet as any dove or song bird ever gave. It is wonderful the number of calls these big, savage birds have; calls so soft and low and quavering—down the wee black chaps would "plop," then down the big ones would sink as if drawn silently from below. Or, if we dared to approach, they would start screaming wildly, evidently some dire meaning in the calls, too, for other loons from other hatching waters, would come swiftly and join in and tell us collectively just what they thought of us. Finally, about September, we saw one of the young birds



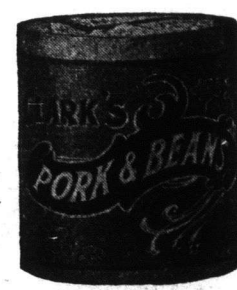
Lifting Loons eggs out of the nest.

awing; they look much like the big western grieve then, but they are ahead of the grieve, for these were only learning to fly when the October migration was on.

The wild, cold days of November drew near and still the loons stayed; ice came at night, sealing the wild rice beds and the smaller bays, and they all took wing for the south, save one adult bird. I presume he could not take wing on account of the calm air or some slight injury; anyhow he was seen next morning



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