

they do a
age, but not
it. In every
personal ob-
been one of
and Fritz, and
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a rat; three
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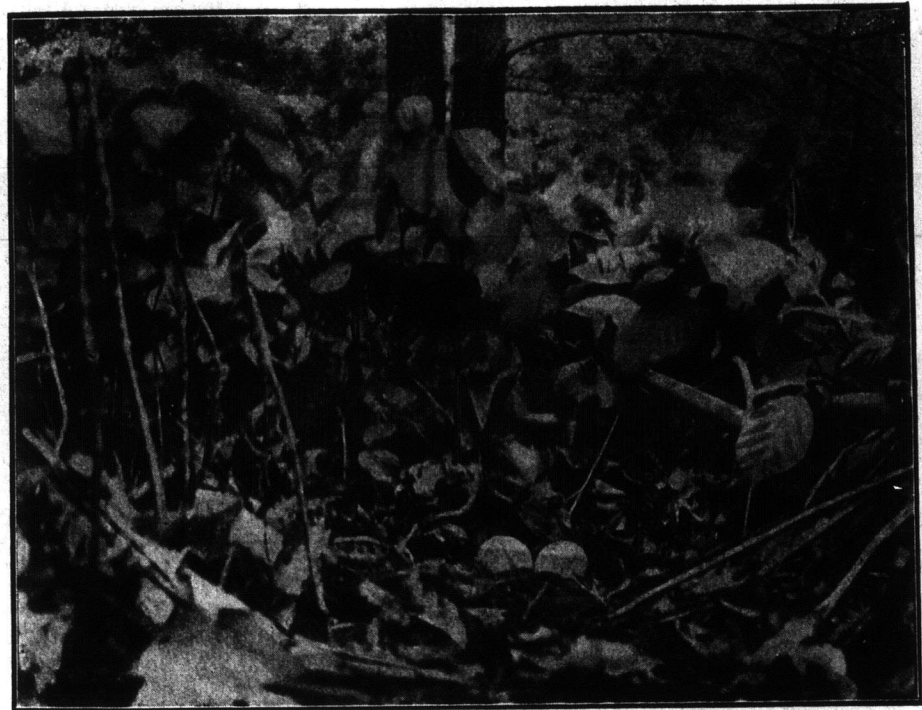
nests were on the islands. The mothers
guided the little downy green ones over
the wide lake to one of the many pond-
holes in the marshes, and drowned
lands and small as the youngsters are
they are able to elude us, although
hawks and owls, mink and big frogs,
yes, even fish, are not averse to a
toothsome wee duckling.

Many are the strange notes the
mother bird uses; odd the piping calls
of the little ones, but the male never
seems to give vent to anything but a
deep note, half quack, half grunt. The
voice of the tame mallard is totally
unlike its wild brothers; coarser, with
none of the sharp, vibrant tone that
makes the duck hunter sit up, and al-
most twist his head off when it sounds
loud and clear just behind.

All this family are poor divers, get-
ting their food near the surface by
merely tipping up. Wound one, and
there is born in him a diving knowledge
that often outwits a clever canoeist and
a good shot.

Through July and August we push
the long green nose of our canoe into
many a deeply-hidden pondhole; never
once do we see those birds at
play as the wood duck and
many other breeds play, usual-
ly the old birds are sleeping upon some
convenient log while the young ones
paddle or sleep alongside. I think the
black duck is a lazy duck.

We can see but a little difference in



Black Duck's Nest

the plumage at any season. It is a lit-
tle brighter, perhaps, in the spring, but
the big, fat chaps seem to be as un-
changing as the watchfulness they in-
herit. The amount of oil they use is
astounding. Constantly, spring, sum-
mer, and fall they are pressing that
broad yellow bill on the little oil teat
just over the tail, and wiping its oily
surface on the feathers. We notice that
when a wounded black duck falls into
the water with that great splash, so
timely and nerve-kindling after a good
shot, it takes to the nearest shore and
presses the water out of the breast
feathers, as the sudden impact soaks it
to the skin. In cold weather the in-
jured birds soon perish if they cannot
dry themselves this way. Wonderful
is the close fitting coat of down and
feathers which never admit a drop of
water unless the bird is wounded. I
have seen them strip their back com-
pletely bare when falling from a great
height, and striking the water a glanc-
ing blow.

There was one old black chap that
used to feed in a little marshy bay op-
posite the island. After we waited for
hours under a broiling sun, he finally
walked right in front of the big
camera and caught a frog—I also
caught him just before he swallowed it.
He dabbed it with his bill, then he
held it down, and swallowed it in a
trice.

Away up the south shore of the lake
at Pine Tree Point, these birds used to
swim in for gravel, this they must have
to assist their digestion at least every

second day. We paddled up there be-
fore the first rays of the sun fell on the
calm lake, concealed the canoe in the
cedars, built two hides over the ma-
chines, rigged the tubes and connecting
lines, and watched a dozen of these big
ducks slowly swimming in.

Up and down the shore they swam,
watching every spot for a possible lurk-
ing-enemy. First one big bird approach-
ed the shore, raised his long neck, eyed
every log and tree, and then swam out
again. A few quacks from her told the
flock all was well. Gradually, watchfully
they swam in, taking over an hour to
do five hundred yards. There we lay
breathless, watching them pick up the
tiny grains of coarse sand,
washing themselves like tame
ducks, preening their feathers, oil-
ing themselves. One big female wad-
dled off the shore as the big machine
clicked, another dipped down after
gravel (we photographed it while the
neck feathers were still wet), but
searched the scene every few seconds
for an enemy—every forty-five seconds
by actual count, never once did a
minute elapse without those bright
eyes scanning the whole shore line.

September was approaching. Gradu-
ally the birds left the pond holes where
the flappers had grown to big birds
capable of sustained flight, and gather-
ed in the back bays of the reservation
where, hidden in the high wild rice they
awaited their fate on the opening day.



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