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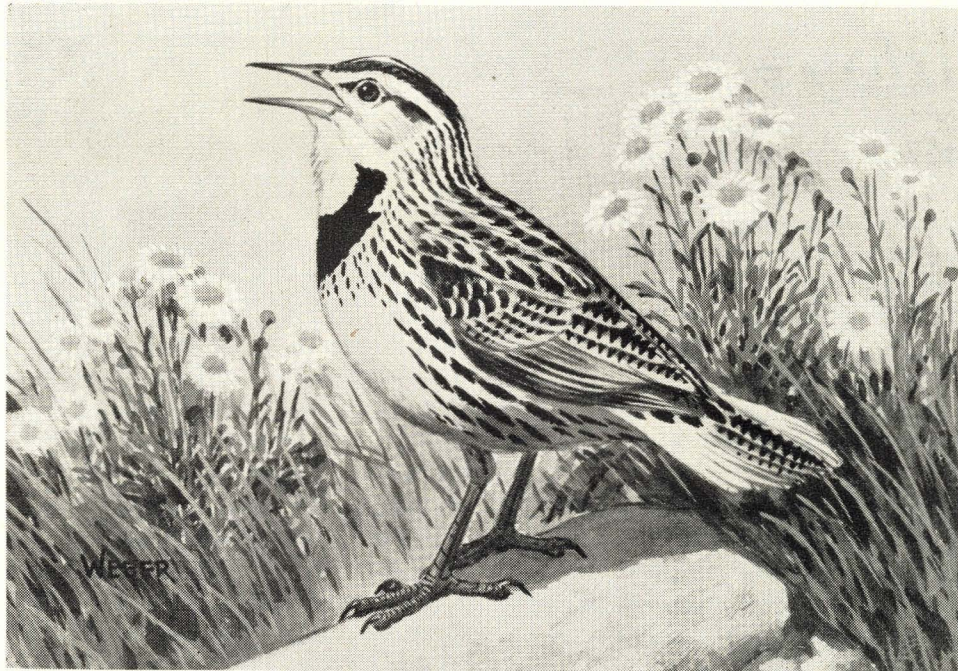
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# Kansas Bird Life



No. 1 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



A National Wildlife Federation Photo.

## WESTERN MEADOWLARK *Sturnella neglecta*

**Where Found in Kansas**—The western meadowlark is a common summer resident in at least the western two-thirds of Kansas, and may be found throughout the state in winter. Its eastern relative, the eastern meadowlark is a common summer resident in at least the northeastern quarter. There is no clear cut line of separation of the two species and their ranges overlap extensively. Hybridization of the two species is probably common in this overlapping area.

**Identifying Characteristics**—A quail sized bird with a streaked brown back. The breast is bright pale yellow crossed with a distinctive black V. When flushed a conspicuous patch of white shows on each side of the short wide tail. Too, the flight pattern of several short, rapid wing-beats alternating with short periods of sailing is characteristic of this bird.

**Voice**—The eastern and western meadowlarks are separated most easily by their song. The song of the eastern species consists of two clear slurred whistles rather musical, but very unlike the seven to ten flute like double noted gurgles of the western bird.

**Habits**—They are birds of the grassland prairie. Their nests are constructed of last year's grasses, usually covered with an arched-over roof, and placed

on the ground under a weed or in a clump of grass. Usually very well hidden. Four to six white eggs speckled and blotched with lilacs and brown are laid. Meadowlarks may be seen the year around throughout Kansas, however our summer residents are probably replaced by migrants from further North during the winter months. Their diet consists mostly of insects in summer and weed seed and waste grain in winter, and so are considered very beneficial by man.

**Notes**—The western meadowlark was very appropriately chosen as the state bird of Kansas on January 29, 1925. Five other states—Montana, Nebraska, Oregon, North Dakota, and Wyoming also claim the meadowlark as their state bird.

Tiny cannibalistic spiders that live by eating each other are said to be the world's highest land animals. They have been found at heights of 22,000 to 23,000 feet on Mount Everest. All plant life stops 4,000 feet below.

The wild goose has been known to live as long as seventy years. Only vultures and parrots are said to have longer life spans.



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 2 in a series

By MARVIN D. SCHWILLING

Game Biologist, Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission



BARN OWL  
*Tyto alba pratincola*

*Where Found in Kansas*—The barn, or monkey faced, owl is found throughout the state. It seems to be partial to old buildings, barns, towers, holes in cliffs and church steeples.

*Identifying Characteristics*—This bird is the most oddly shaped of all the owls. It has long legs for its size. Its plumage is smooth and compact and mostly the color of scorched linen, light yellow brown. Each eye is set in the center of a radiating disc of light colored feathers and the whole face is surrounded by a heart shaped ring of brown. In flight it can be told from other owls by the whitish cinnamon underparts and the rusty buff upper plumage.

*Similar Species*—Short-eared owl, but has a darker, rounder face, darker underparts and shorter legs.

*Voice*—Does not have a musical voice, but will utter an eerie rasping hiss or snort and click its bill excitedly when cornered.

*Habits*—These birds are nocturnal, night-feeding birds of prey and so are not often seen in the daytime, but more often in the late evenings or after dark.

During the day they loaf in dark concealed places. They are probably one of our most beneficial birds as they have no equal in the destruction of rats and mice. They may well be referred to as living mouse-traps as virtually all of their diet is normally made up of these despised rodents. They rarely molest other birds, probably never except when forced by hunger.

The nest, too, is placed in barns, hollow trees, holes in cliffs, deserted buildings, towers and church steeples. The eggs are white and usually number from five to seven. Unlike most birds, incubation begins when the first egg is laid; thus, one often finds both young and eggs, or young of different sizes in a single nest.

The kangaroo rat never drinks a drop of liquid from the day it leaves its mother's nest until it dies. For water, it eats small, juicy tubers.

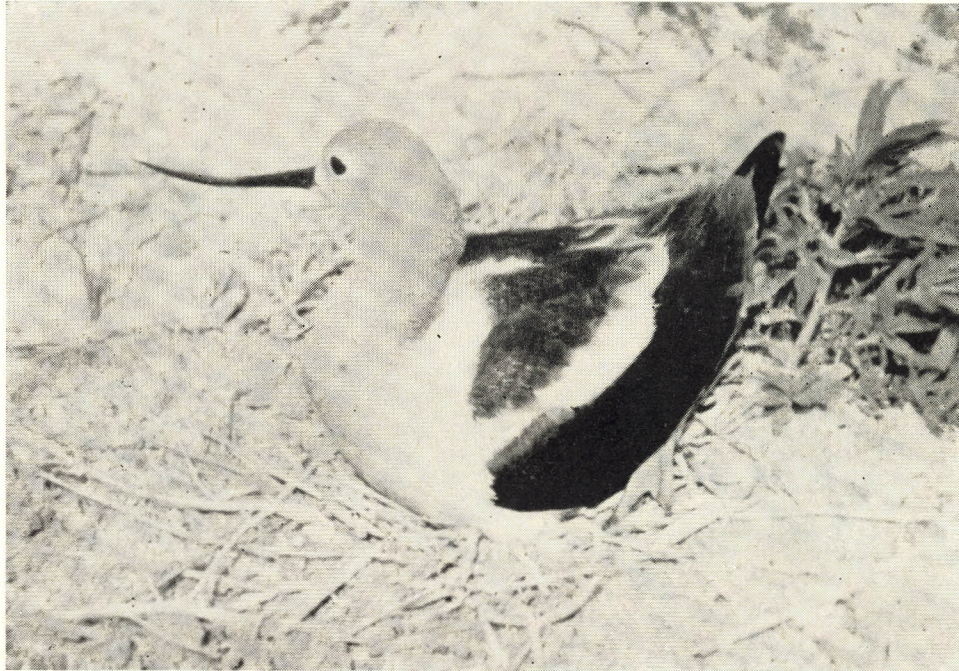
Young mallard ducks can swim a third of a mile as soon as they leave the nest.



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 3 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



AVOCET

*Recurvirostra Americana*

**Where Found in Kansas**—The avocet is now a common summer resident and nester, where suitable habitat is found, in about the western one-third to one-half of Kansas. It also may be seen on rare occasions in extreme eastern Kansas during migration.

**Identifying Characteristics**—The avocet is said to be the most showy of our shorebirds. It is about "teal" size. The body is largely white with wide contrasting black and white wing stripes. The head and neck are rusty, cinnamon brown. The bill is long and slender and curves distinctly upward. The avocet has long, "stilt-like" legs. He is often seen wading and feeding in shallow water. He has an odd habit of swishing the soft mud to and fro sideways as he feeds in the shallows. His feet are partially webbed and he is a good swimmer.

**Similar Species**—Practically none. Some could confuse it with the black-necked stilt, although the stilt is rare in Kansas. It is slightly smaller, but without the rust cinnamon brown head. The bill, too, is considerably shorter and not upturned. Essentially it is solid black above and white below.

**Voice**—A single noted "wheek" repeated constantly when scolding.

**Habits**—The avocet is a bird of the shallow, flat, pothole ponds of the prairie country. It nests close to water, usually in the edge of the first sparse grass along the wave-swept shore of these flat, often alkaline, potholes. In western Kansas, at least, it seems to show a definite preference for islands as nesting sites when they are available. Not much of a nest is constructed; grass, grass roots and weed stems are used. The eggs, normally four, are a buffy olive, thickly spotted with various shades of brown and are very pointed on one end.

**Notes**—Long-time residents of western Kansas tell me the avocet has nested here for some time. However, the first published record was apparently not until the spring of 1951 when I observed three nests a short distance north of Garden City. Since then I have seen nests each spring. The largest number of observed nests in a single nesting season is 23, recorded from several scattered counties in 1954.

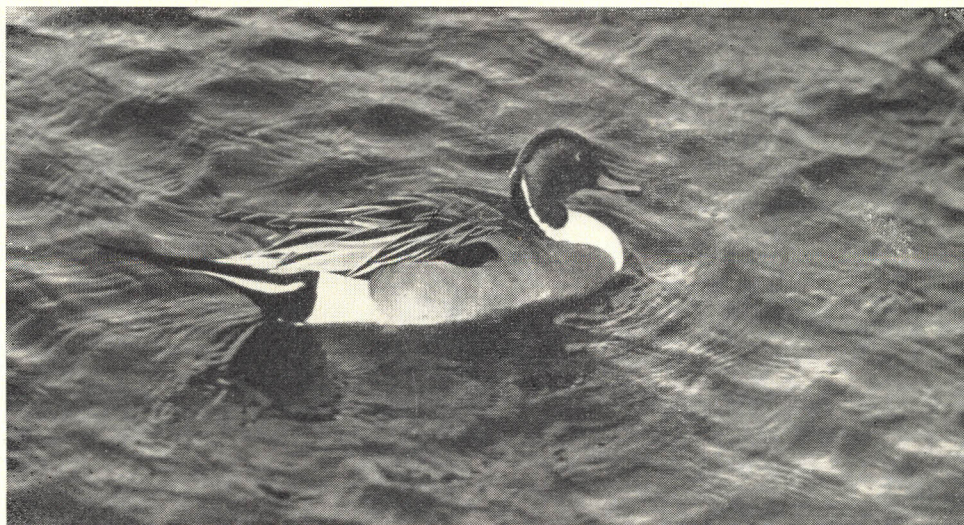
The snapping turtle never feeds out of water because it cannot swallow unless its head is submerged.



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 4 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



PINTAIL

*Anas Acuta*

**Where Found in Kansas**—The pintail is one of the commonest migratory ducks to pass through Kansas. It flies through our state on its southern journey which usually begins in September. A few often stay throughout the winter but not usually in large numbers. They pass through again en route to their more northern nesting grounds in February and March. In recent years it appears that they have become increasingly more abundant nesters in the western sector of Kansas.

**Identifying Characteristics**—The male pintail is wonderfully garbed in an effective blending of gray, white and brown. He is white-breasted and has a long slim neck that has a conspicuous white strip running up the neck and onto the side of the brown head. The central tail feathers are long and pointed. This graceful long neck and long pointed tail gives this duck a different appearance from the other surface feeding ducks. The female is a nondescript mottled brown duck with a pointed tail. The speculum, color patch of the secondary wing feathers, is iridescent green, violet and bronze bordered in front by a cinnamon buff bar and behind by a black inner bar and white outer bar.

**Similar Species**—Male, none. Female, may be easily confused with female gadwall and baldpate.

**Voice**—Teal-like, wheezy, mewling sound, with occasional low quack.

**Habits**—Pintails are surface feeding ducks, preferring shallow ponds, sloughs and marshy areas with much vegetation growing in the water. Small dry islands seem to be favored nesting sites although nests often have been reported as much as a mile from water hidden in dry prairie grass.

**Notes**—Most, if not all, publications describing the breeding range of the pintail do not include Kansas as being within their nesting range, so probably the pintail did not originally nest here. However in recent years it appears that they have become increasingly more common as nesters. Clarence Lenard of Lakin, Kansas, formerly of Pawnee county, told me of a nest during the "dirty thirties" (1938 or 1939) near Garfield, Kansas, from which young pintails were hatched successfully at a windmill waterhole.

On June 9, 1954, Ivan Sutton and I found a nest of the pintail northwest of Garden City. The nest was on a small island in Ackley lake and contained seven eggs. All seven eggs hatched on June 15. About a year later on June 12, 1955, Larry Mosby, Bill Lynn and I observed three broods of young pintails in the pothole country just south of Friend, Kansas, also in Finney county. The young varied in age from a few days to approximately five weeks. Undoubtedly there are other records of which I am not aware. It would seem that more pintails are becoming residents of Kansas.



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 5 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



SPARROW HAWK  
(*Falco sparverium sparverius*)

**Where Found in Kansas**—The sparrow hawk, or kestrel, is to be found throughout the state of Kansas as a permanent year-around resident. It is usually more common as a summer resident and nester, than a winter resident. This suggests that our summer residents have moved further south for the winter and in their place we are host to their more northerly relatives that apparently are more winter hardy.

**Identifying Characteristics**—This is the smallest of American hawks, being less than a foot long. Males and females are marked almost alike. The major difference is the brightness of color with the male being much the brightest. Also, the coloring of the secondary wing coverts, or shoulders are different in the two sexes, being blue-ash tipped with wedge shaped spots of black in the male, and rusty brown, but still having the wedge shaped black tips, in the female. Another difference in the two sexes is the tail pattern. The tail of the male is solid red brown with a broad black band near the end of the white tipped tail. The female has five to seven narrow imperfect black bars throughout the red brown portion. Both have seven characteristically placed black patches on the head and face that are very eye catching and noticeable. The primaries, main flight feathers, are pale dusky with

yellowish tips. The two outermost primaries are notched on the inner web.

**Similar Species**—The pigeon hawk is the only other hawk of this small size to occur in Kansas, and then only during the winter. The two are almost identical in size, however, the pigeon hawk has a noticeably longer tail in proportion to the rest of the body and is easily separated by this character. The pigeon hawk is considered rare in Kansas and what few do occur are often missed by bird observers who probably pass them over as female sparrow hawks, as indeed they are very similar. The long tail, broad bands in the tail, and the lack of distinct black face bars are good separation characters.

**Voice**—An alarming, rather high pitched, quickly repeated killy-killy-killy-killy, more noticeable and louder than the calls of most of our larger hawks.

**Habits**—The sparrow hawk is our most sociable hawk. It, too, is very colorful and most beneficial in its food habits so should be a welcome friend wherever found. They prefer open and sparsely timbered areas, orchards, farmsteads, and large isolated partially dead trees. Often they are to be found even in the heart of our large cities where, in the absence of trees, it perches in crevices and niches high up on

large buildings. From their high lookout they await the appearance of prey below. When food appears they often fly directly over it and poise on hovering wings waiting for the right moment when he drops downward catching the prey in his talons and returns to the perch to tear it into eatable bits at leisure.

They nest in a wide variety of situations, varying from the preferred abandoned woodpecker hole, to natural tree cavities, holes in earthen banks, artificial nesting boxes or in crannies of outbuildings. Frank Wood told me of an unusual situation where a pair of sparrow hawks raised a brood in one of the compartments of his purple martin house with no rivalry resulting between them and the other residents of the box. No nesting material is used and the four to six handsomely marked, buff colored eggs that are speckled and blotched with red and brown are deposited on natural litter. Coloration of the eggs varies considerably from tiny specks on a white background, to heavy large blotches on a buffy background.

Of all the falcons, the sparrow hawk is undoubtedly the most beneficial. At times it may attack small birds but its usual bill of fare is insects and mice. Grasshoppers, crickets, and other insects make up the bulk of their food when they are available. Indeed a more fitting name for this bird would be grasshopper hawk or mouse hawk.

**Notes**—The almost legendary popular belief by many that the only good hawks are dead hawks is truly unfortunate. It has been proven that the hawks and owls, as a group, are the most beneficial group of birds to man for their unending war against the horde of small rodents that are a constant nuisance and destroyers of man's agricultural crops and foods. This ill-feeling toward all hawks is not, of course, completely without foundation as the sharp-shinned hawk and the Coopers hawk are truly destructive species. Thus all hawks are often persecuted for the misdeeds of their relatives.

This pretty little falcon as a rule does not tame well or make desirable pets. However the picture shown here is of a young male that tamed unusually well into a devoted pet. His favorite perch was atop a utility pole from which he would beg for food swooping down to take anything offered from the hand. From this perch he often caught dragon flies that came to a nearby stock tank. This led apparently to his death as he was found drowned in the tank. No particulars of the tragedy are known.

There are over forty kinds of sparrows in the United States.

## Outdoor Notes

By JOE AUSTELL SMALL

The eyes of a whale are set far back and look in opposite directions. They cannot be moved to look straight ahead or behind. If Mr. Heapbigfish wants to see what's on the horizon, he must stand up in the water and slowly turn around.

### Modern Sampson

The flea is so tiny that hundreds of them could be placed on a quarter at one time. Yet they can jump three or four feet in a single leap.

A man, if given the same strength in proportion to his size, could jump six miles!

The flea can lift one hundred and forty times his own weight. This means that a man, in proportion, could easily lift a ten-ton truck.

The average life of a flea is six months, yet it can be taught to do all kinds of complicated tricks. Some have been taught to juggle, pull tiny wagons, dance, or even kick a tiny ball.

### Seeing the Sights After Dark

When it is necessary to shoot in the dark, wet the top of your rifle barrel and the sights can then be seen more easily due to the moisture reflecting light of the moon and stars.

### Camp Kinks

Before you leave camp, pour water on your campfire and cover it with dirt.

Butter, lard and other perishable foods can be kept a long time if sunk in a spring or stream in tightly-closed Mason jars.

To prevent coffee from boiling over the campfire, lay a green twig across the top of the coffee pail.

Powdered milk and powdered coffee are light to pack and are easily and quickly made in camp.

### Short Snorts

Snakes possess so many structural features suggesting structural features of birds that many scientists have treated birds and reptiles as a single group—the Sauropsida.

The well-informed sportsman says: "A bevy of quail; flight of doves; brood of grouse; covey of partridges; flock of geese; plump of ducks; stand of plover; and wisp of snipe."



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 6 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



WOOD DUCK  
(*Aix sponsa*)

## The Showiest of Kansas Waterfowl

**Where Found in Kansas**—The wood duck is appropriately named for it, more than any other duck, is a woodland bird. They are to be found in our forested bottomlands, along our wooded streams and around wooded ponds in the eastern portion of our state. Their range continues on to central and western Kansas where heavy stream woodland habitat is available. Their Kansas nesting range, is poorly known and they are probably only transients in the west.

Although wood ducks may be found in Kansas at all seasons they are migratory, but to a much lesser degree than most of our other North American ducks and they seldom leave the borders of the United States.

**Identifying Characteristics**—The most beautiful and richly colored of our ducks and the only true duck with a crest. The male has a metallic iridescent green and purple head with a white throat. White stripes begin near the eye and run back into the long heavy crest. There is a black collar around the neck. The chest is purple chestnut with white spots. Underparts, in flight, show mostly white. The female is marked similar to the male but is much less colorful, being mostly gray and white.

**Similar Species**—None. The female wood duck may

sometimes be confused with female and young baldpates in flight, however wood ducks show broad square tails while the baldpates have pointed tails. **VOICE**—They do not quack. The female call is a distressing, two syllabled, *Khoo-eeek Khoo-eeek Khoo-eeek* and the male makes a finch like *jeeeee* on a rising scale, or shrill *peet*.

**Habits**—Wood ducks are peculiarly wood ducks in many ways. They sometimes perch on branches of trees, very unducklike, but like many of our other birds. They too climb leaning trees using their sharp toenails and hooked bill.

They feed heavily on acorns, pecans, and other woodland nuts, when in season. They usually feed on the ground or water but are not entirely dependent upon aquatic plants and animals, or even on food which is found on the ground, as they also eat flying insects, particularly grasshoppers.

The natural nesting site is in a hollow tree, preferably in the woods, although it may be some distance back from water. Owing to the increasing scarcity of large hollow trees these ducks sometimes seem hard pressed to find suitable nesting locations. Increased uncontrolled burning of woodlands, by man, destroys



most of the big dead and hollow trees. Coons, squirrels and other hollow inhabiting animals and birds utilize many of those remaining, often resulting in a serious and limiting element in the nesting welfare of the wood ducks. Thus in many areas they have responded well to artificial nesting boxes when made available by interested groups. Arguments and disagreement as to just how the ducklings, when only a day or so old, ever reach the ground or water from this lofty nest have been many. It was once believed that the mother bird carried them one at a time on her back or in her bill to water; conclusive proof of this feat, however, is lacking and it has been witnessed on a number of instances that the mother bird simply leaves the nest and calls to the young from a nearby perch or from beneath the nest, coaching them to climb up to the opening, using their specially equipped toe hook, or claws, and their hooked bill. As they reach the opening they simply jump out and fall to the ground or water below. You may wonder how the young survive this fall from the nest, and so have research workers who have experimentally dropped these heavily down-covered young as far as eighty feet on bare ground without ill effect. Apparently the fluffy down slows down the velocity of the fall and cushions the impact sufficiently.

**Notes**—The nesting range of the wood duck in Kansas is poorly known. The ducks are very secretive during the nesting season and can seldom be seen, even in areas where they are very common. Nests on several occasions have been found in barnlofts and tree cavities near inhabited living quarters where the ducks had never even been seen.

Early hunting seasons of the past were detrimental to the wood ducks as the season opened before the southern flight of most waterfowl, which nest in the far north, had begun. Thus our summer ducks were, for awhile, the only available game. This and other reasons elsewhere mentioned caused the government to class the wood duck at one time as one of our vanishing species. For many years they were given the fullest protection of the law. In fact, the past hunting season, the season of 1955, was the first for many years that a wood duck could be taken as legal game in Kansas. Again this season one bird a day may be included in the hunter's bag.

During the years before this bird was placed on the protected list, they were sought for their gaudy plumage that was used in the manufacture of fishing lures and other adornments.

Today the Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission's newest waterfowl refuge, the Marais des Cygnes Wildfowl Refuge, is proving to be a favorite haunt of the wood ducks. We have had only scattered

known nesting records from this sector in the past. However, during the nesting season of 1956 twenty-four nesting boxes were placed experimentally on the area, some over newly constructed lakes and others in timbered areas near water. This was a co-operative project with the nearby Valley Ranger and Walnut Valley 4-H clubs and the refuge. Nine of the boxes were placed over water and all were used as potential nesting sites. Those placed further from water received less usage. Squirrels and raccoons, both abundant in the area, were found to be serious predators. However, when the boxes could be placed over at least two feet of water the frequency of predation was much less common. Possibly the placing of the boxes over water and banding the poles with a strip of tin will do much to lessen such predation.

Detailed information from the mid-April check of the nest boxes indicated nine boxes showed signs of wood duck use. Four boxes, all over water, contained eggs. One contained 23 eggs, another 16 eggs, and the two others two eggs each. Another check was made on May 14 and 15 and again four boxes contained eggs, three of them new nests. These boxes contained 23, 22, 12 and 11 eggs, respectively. The box containing 23 eggs had many pipped eggs and hatched the next day. The young left the box the day following hatching. Seventeen of the eggs hatched and sixteen of the young left with the female. One young either hatched late or was too weak to get out of the box and perished.

Those boxes containing more than 16 eggs were believed to be the product of more than one female as such partnership nests are not uncommon for this bird. Two other broods were known to have successfully hatched on the refuge that were not from the nest boxes. From this it would appear that as more lakes are constructed, and the refuge is developed, we can expect more use of this refuge by these most colorful ducks.

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### Big Appetites

A meadow mouse consumes its own weight in food every 24 hours. A camel can drink 25 gallons of water in half an hour. A hippopotamus has a stomach over 10 feet long, capable of holding four or five hundred pounds of food.

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### Mallards Adaptable

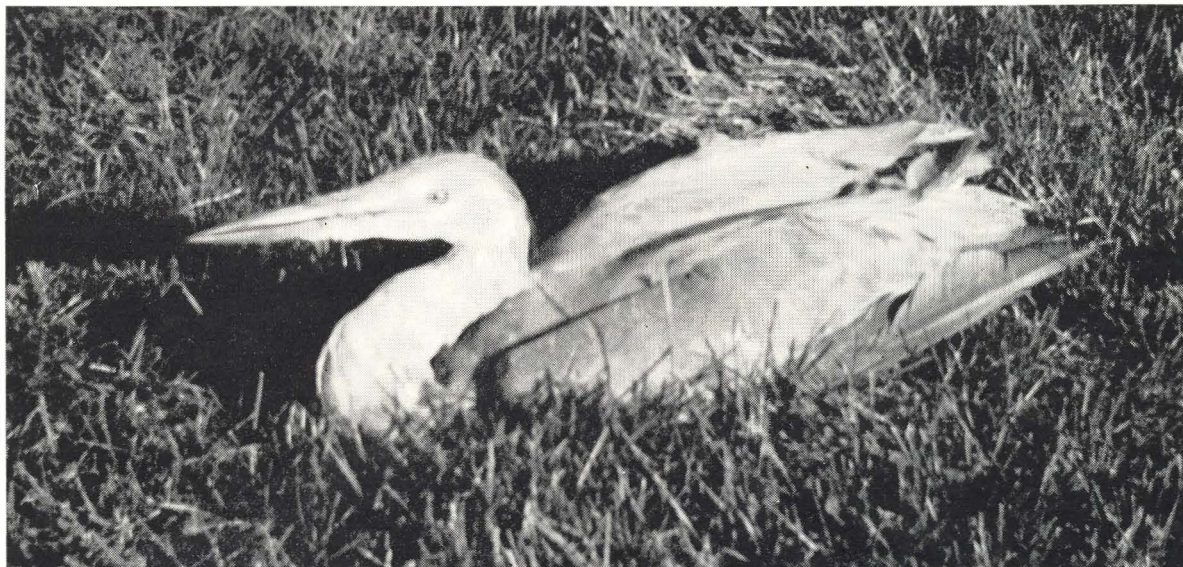
The adaptability of the common mallard has made it the chief wild duck of the world. It will breed almost anywhere it can find suitable habitat, and readily adapts itself to civilization.



# Kansas Bird Life



No. 7 . . . in a series—MARVIN D. SCHWILLING



GREAT BLUE HERON

(*Ardea herodias*)

**Where Found in Kansas**—The great blue heron is a large handsome bird. In fact it is the largest and most conspicuous heron in all of North America. In Kansas it is to be found state-wide, during the summer months, appearing in March and leaving again by the middle of November. They are common in all parts of the state but are most abundant in the central portion, their abundance tapering off almost equally to the east and to the west. Many of our outdoorsmen and country people refer to this bird as the "blue crane." This, however, is an unfortunate mistake in identity. We do have a blue crane that migrates across Kansas each spring and fall, the sandhill crane. The two birds are entirely unrelated species and should not be confused.

**Identifying Characteristics**—The great blue heron's large size, about four feet tall, its long legs, long neck and sharp pointed long bill all help to identify him. Also in flight, its folded neck doubled up S-shape, and trailing legs mark it as a heron. The white about the head and neck and over-all blue-gray body coloration mark it as only the great blue heron.

**Similar Species**—The great blue heron is often confused with the sandhill crane; however, the crane has a more robust body with red on the head and face. In flight the heron carries its neck doubled up S-shape with its head drawn back and appearing to rest on its

shoulders. The crane flies with its neck fully extended and with legs trailing appearing overhead like a flying cross. These cranes normally migrate in large flocks arranged in a wide V much like the pattern of migrating geese. Migrating herons fly in no such set pattern.

**Voice**—Coarse low croaks, harsh and rasping. When alarmed this croak is sometimes prolonged into a series of squawks.

**Habits**—The great blue heron is a solitary bird. They seem to prefer to be completely alone, except during migration or around the nesting colony, which we call a heronry. Heronries in Kansas vary in size from two nests to the large 210 nest colony in Sedgwick county. The nests are large bulky affairs constructed of sticks and placed in tall trees. In Kansas they seem to prefer sycamore trees, when they are available, but use cottonwood trees commonly in the west. This massive nest cradles three or four blue eggs when it is completed.

The feeding habits of this bird are as odd as they are efficient. They stand like statues in shallow water waiting for some unsuspecting fish, frog, crawfish, or other water creature to come within striking distance. When they do, the long folded neck darts out driving the six-inch spearlike bill straight to its mark. Only very rarely does it miss the intended victim. It is

generally believed that all herons feed largely on fish or other aquatic life. The great blue heron at times departs from this family trait and frequents hillsides, cultivated fields, and dry meadows in search of mice, gophers, ground squirrels and other small rodents. These are captured by the customary long waiting period which ends swiftly when the rodent wanders, or shows itself, within striking range of the heron's bill. Studies have shown that a very large proportion of the food of the young are made up of these injurious rodents. Some fishermen believe these birds kill and eat many of the game fish that they themselves would rather have. Actually, as food habits have shown they take mostly rough fish. Only the slowest and least healthy of the game fish can be caught. Undoubtedly, they are indeed a friend to the fisherman instead of a foe.

I have been told of two occasions when different hunters afield with their dogs shot and crippled great blue herons, thinking them to be enemies of the fisherman. Their unsuspecting dogs approached too close to the crippled bird. Both dogs lost an eye to the powerful thrust of the heron's beak. Perhaps this was punishment to the hunter for having shot a friend.



Brown County State Lake near Hiawatha has been a consistent producer of good angling since its opening late last fall. Frank Kurtz and George Johnson, both of Atchison, took these twenty channel catfish there on March 12. Bass and crappie are also appearing regularly on stringers at the lake.

Recent estimates say only about 1,000 pairs of bald eagles are left in the United States.

Each eye of a moose commands a separate field of vision. This makes their judgment of distance, and the detection of stationary objects, quite difficult. But they quickly detect moving objects.

## Outdoor Notes

By JOE AUSTELL SMALL

### Time and Direction

To find directions with your watch, point the hour or little hand in the direction of the sun. Halfway between the hour hand and 12 is south. If the sky is overcast and no sun is visible, hold a splinter of wood vertical from the center of your thumbnail. It is almost always possible to see a shadow cast by the splinter, and thus determine the location of the sun.

### Windies From the Ozarks

There are three tall ones I especially like in Vance Randolph's book, "We Always Lie to Strangers." One is about the boys who threw bags of starch into crooked Ozark streams. Big fish swallowed the bags while our fishermen walked down to the first river bend. When the starched fish came along, they were so stiff they couldn't make the turn and were easily harpooned.

And then there is Clarence Sharp, the resourceful duck hunter, who has a gun that kills so far up he has to put salt on the pellets to keep the birds from spoiling before they hit the ground.

But my favorite is the one about the old hunter who was asked what gauge shotgun he used. "Well," he reflected, "I can't exactly call the number of it, but she's a pretty big gun. Whenever it needs cleanin', we just grease a groundhog and run him through the barr'l!"

### What's in a Name?

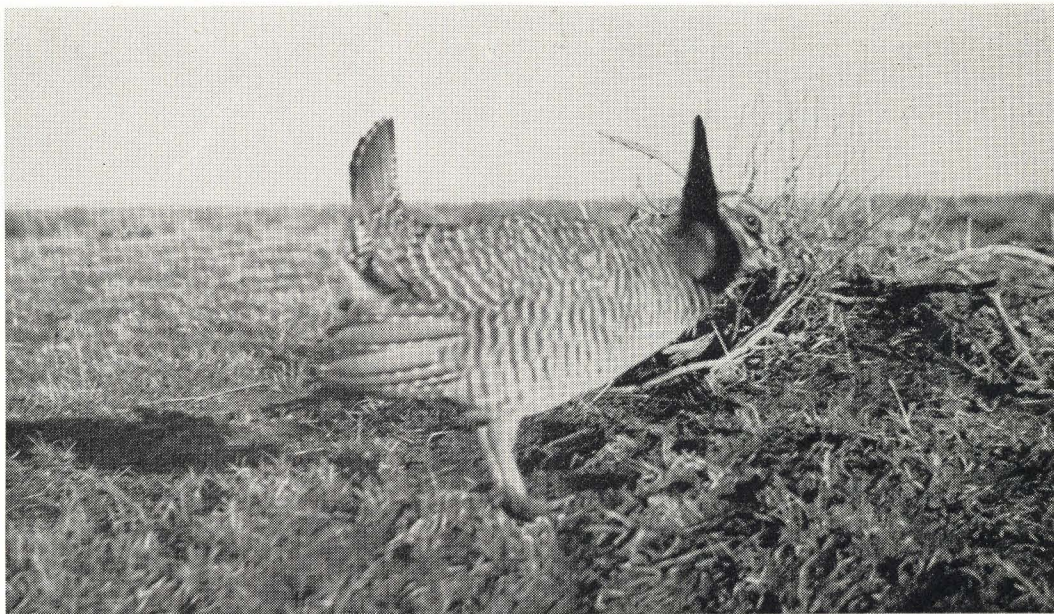
If you're a good enough marksman, you can kill a puma, brown tiger, cougar, catamount, silver lion, purple panther, mountain screamer, American lion, and mountain lion all with one shot. No trick—these are just common names for a single animal, the *felis concolor*, generally known as mountain lion.

### What a Mistake!

I ran this one several years ago and have had so much comment on it, I think the thing deserves a repeat. It actually happened.

It was at the height of deer season in Wisconsin. A fellow hit the dirt when a high-powered slug whined over his head. He lay tight until a red-coated female rushed up and asked breathlessly if he was hurt.

"Really, I'm awfully sorry," she admitted. "I thought you were my husband!"



LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN . . . *Tympanuchus pallidicinctus*

## Kansas Bird Life

By MARVIN D. SCHWILLING

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The lesser prairie chicken, properly named the pinnated grouse, probably occurred throughout at least the southwestern one-fourth of Kansas originally—or before the drought of the “dirty thirties.” Today their nesting range is restricted largely to the grassland—sagebrush and sandy areas along, or near, the Arkansas and Cimarron rivers. Extending east not quite half way across Kansas. They are seldom seen outside of this type habitat in summer. However, their seasonal fall and winter shift to feed in small grain fields may find the birds wandering up to thirty or forty miles outside of this area.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—A large pheasant sized bird weighing a little over a pound and a half. Overall build similar in shape to an overgrown bobwhite quail. Overall plumage is a transverse barred pattern of brown, black and gray. The males have a patch of long neck feathers, called pinnae, on either side of the neck that cover the air sacs. These feathers are erected straight up so as to almost, if not, touch above the head when the male struts and inflates the air sacs to produce the legendary booming sound.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—The plumage coloration of the lesser and the greater prairie chicken are very similar. However they are not often confused in Kansas due to their difference in range and habitat requirements. The greater chicken is a bird of the tall grass areas

of eastern and northern Kansas. The lesser chicken is a bird of the grass-sagebrush sandhill areas of southwestern Kansas.

The arrangement of these transverse bars on the lesser chicken differ from those in the plumage on the back and neck of the greater chicken in that they have a broad brown bar enclosed by two narrow black bars. The greater has single broad and black bands. This barring continues on through the broad but short tail of the females but not in the males. Their tail is solid dark brown, almost black, with a white band around the outer end.

The air sacs of the lesser prairie chicken, when inflated, are a rather dull rubber red in color. They remind me very much of a child's small rubber ball. However the air sacs of the greater prairie chicken are considerably larger and a golden yellow in color. In fact the color of the greater chickens air sacs are the same golden yellow color as the eyebrows of both species.

**VOICE**—Both the males and the females cackle much like a domestic chicken. And the males are capable of producing a sound called “booming” while performing on the dancing grounds in the spring. It is difficult to describe the sound made by the lesser chicken while booming. It seems to me to consist of a slurring blu-r-r-r-p—blu-r-r-r-p—blu-r-r-r-p usually in a series of five or more such bursts. This blurr-

ing sound carries well and can be heard a considerable distance, up to at least two miles on quiet mornings.

**HABITS**—Prairie chickens are fascinating creatures in a variety of ways. They congregate into flocks in the fall and winter to leave the grassland-sagebrush area morning and evening, often flying several miles to feed in grain fields. They normally return to the grass and sage to loaf and roost. They have a fast rocking and rolling flight, similar to that of the bob-white quail. Their wings beat rapidly on the take off but as they gain the desired altitude they sail away rocking from side to side on their deeply cupped wings.

The flocks begin breaking up as spring approaches. The males begin their regular morning and evening visits to their old established booming grounds about the middle of February. These twice daily visits continue until about June 10 at which time the males go into a heavy molt and seek seclusion in the sagebrush. At the height of the booming season the males may stay and boom all night on the grounds if the moon is full and light is sufficient.

As the cocks break off from the spring flocks, the hens, too, quarrel among themselves and do not associate with each other until after the nest has been built and the young raised. The males do not help in nest building or brood raising. As insects, their principle summer food, become scarce in the fall they again group up to feed in the grain fields.

As a game bird the prairie chicken has excellent hunting qualities. There are many accounts in our history of the abundant hunting offered by this bird to the early day Kansas hunter. Unfortunately it was one of the many species that undoubtedly suffered great losses to the market hunters of that period. However they were so seriously reduced in numbers by the drought of the dirty thirties, which virtually destroyed most of their original habitat, that no hunting season has been permitted on this particular chicken since that time.

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The ruffed grouse is known to have lived in the forested parts of the northern United States and Canada for at least 25,000 years.

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The main purpose of the wild, tom turkey's gobbling seems to be to attract hens, which he gathers into harems, but it also serves as a sort of competitive call with other gobblers.

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Young wild turkeys begin nesting in trees as soon as they're able to fly—usually at four or five weeks of age.



**Melvin Beckman** of Carbondale, Kansas went fishing one fine day along about the first of July. He dropped a worm baited hook into Leavenworth County State Lake and proceeded to catch this 47-pound flathead. This whopper measured 48 inches in length. In the background can be seen the concession house at this popular fishing lake in northeast Kansas.



**Those big smiles** on the faces of Ward Rennie and Jack Ullom of Montezuma are understandable. After all, strings of channel catfish like these are not an every-day catch for most fishermen. In three days of fishing, these two anglers took a total of 46 channels. The location isn't any secret—Clark County State Lake was the spot. The bait used was crawdad tails.

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The trumpeter swan is the largest species of native waterfowl now living in North America. Trumpeters weighing 32 pounds and with 10-foot wingspreads have been reported.



**AMERICAN COOT** . . . *Fulica americana*

## Kansas Bird Life

By **MARVIN D. SCHWILLING** . . . No. 9 in a series

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The American coot, or mud hen as it is more commonly called, is abundant during the spring and fall waterfowl migration throughout the state of Kansas. Some usually stay, at least in the eastern portion of the state, all winter and are associated with the wintering flocks of ducks. Coots are not common summer residents in Kansas.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The coot, our only marsh bird, is duck-like with a white bill. This mark serves as an infallible field mark. Over-all color of the coot is slate-gray. Its head and neck are blacker than the body, with a white patch under the tail. In flight, a white border shows on the trailing edge of the wing. When swimming it pumps its head and neck with each stroke of the feet.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—The gallinules are similar to the American coot, however gallinules have red bills instead of white. Where coots and gallinules are found together, the coot is the larger with a somewhat bigger head. Only two species of gallinules are known to Kansas, both of which are rare and irregular.

**VOICE**—Various cackling and croaking notes and a guttural kuk-kuk-kuk-kuk.

**HABITS**—The habits of the coot appear to be about midway between the wading birds and the true swimmers. They often share in the marsh habits of the

rails and gallinules, but are more truly aquatic than either. Their toes are lobed, not webbed like a duck, but similar to those of the grebes, enabling the bird to walk on floating vegetation or over soft mud with ease. They are often found in association with ducks on lakes, bays and open water. They dive expertly in deep water for plant foods, but seem to rise from the water in flight with difficulty, pattering their feet for a considerable distance before becoming completely airborne.

Their nests are placed in dense semi-aquatic vegetation such as bullrushes or cattails. The nests are deeply cupped and well built, being cleverly woven among living vegetation so that the nest may rise or fall with fluctuations of the water level. Water depth under the nest usually varies from six to thirty inches.

**NOTES**—The American coot, or mud hen, is at times extremely abundant throughout Kansas in both spring and fall migration and usually can be found in the company of large flocks of overwintering ducks, particularly mallards. There are only a few scattered nesting records from our state.

I have seen nests with eggs only in the spring of 1951. This nesting colony was in Finney County some six miles north of Garden City in an area locally known as the pronghorn area. I located several nests

during the latter part of May that year. They were situated in bullrush clumps growing in about two feet of water. This area was in the path of a terrific hailstorm on May 30, 1951. The storm was extremely destructive and the stones of such large size that over 200 head of sheep were killed from one flock. Practically all wildlife, birds and animals alike, were killed. Jackrabbits, pheasants and even the muskrats in the marshes were unable to survive. Needless to say this nesting attempt of the coot was not a success.

There are also nesting records from the salt marshes of Stafford County. I know of no records from eastern Kansas. However, six to eight birds remained all summer on the Ottawa Hunting Club Lake near Boicourt, Linn County, in 1956. I made no search for nests although I assumed nesting was attempted.

Hunting stories of "coot" hunts, particularly along the eastern seaboard, frequently appear in popular sports magazines. This is confusing to many readers from the interior states and have even led some to believe that what we call the coot in Kansas is not a coot at all, but must be some other waterbird. They

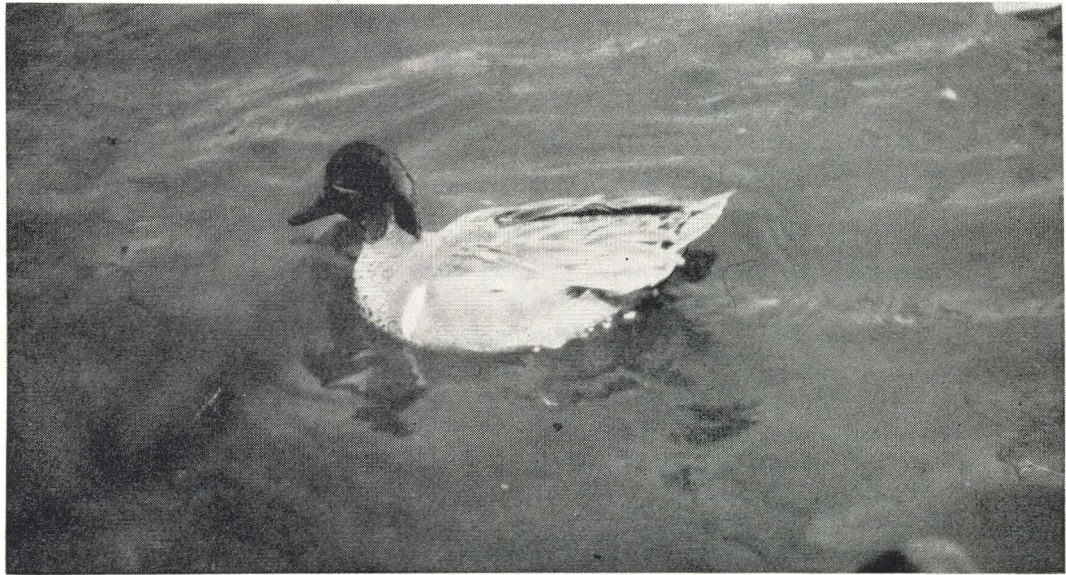


Nest of the Coot

know the bird they read about is not the same bird we have here in Kansas. This confusion or overlapping use of common names is unfortunate as we have the true American coot, only native North American form of this subfamily. The birds referred to as "coots" along the coastal areas are actually scoters and are members of the large subfamily of diving ducks.



Visitors to the Kansas Sports, Boat and Travel Show in Wichita this year found the display pictured here. The Fish and Game Commission booth proved to be very attractive to the throngs which appeared at this annual event. A similar display was used at the Dodge City Sports Show for the first time.



No. 10 in a series

Green-winged Teal . . . (*Nettion carolinense*)

## Kansas Bird Life

By **MARVIN D. SCHWILLING**

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The green-winged teal is one of the more common ducks to migrate twice yearly through Kansas. Their fall migration into Kansas usually follows behind the pintails, blue-winged teal, and the earlier mallards. Usually they do not arrive in large numbers until late October or November. They often linger here into late winter, or as long as any open water is available. Their Northern spring flights are early, following closely on the heels of the pintails and mallards. They are one of the earliest ducks to reach their summer homes which extends from the Northern prairie regions of the United States to as far North as Northern Alaska.

There are no known records of the green-winged teal nesting in Kansas.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The male green-winged teal is a beautifully marked very small greyish duck with a slightly crested red-brown head and a green face patch that begins near the eye and runs nearly to the back of the head. Main identifying features are extremely small size, vertical white bar on side of body in front of wing, speculum glossy black outwardly and metallic green inwardly bordered in front and behind with a buffy brown bar. The plumage of the female is mottled-brown with a white breast. Her speculum is similar in color to that of the male but of duller coloration.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—This duck could be confused easily with the European Teal. The European Teal, how-

ever, lacks the vertical white bar ahead of the wing, but has a horizontal white bar along line of the shoulder above the wing. The European Teal is a duck of the Atlantic states and has not been reported to occur in Kansas.

**VOICE**—Like most birds the green-winged teal has several calls. The more common call of the male is a mellow whistle or twittering call. They, too, have a call similar to that of a spring peeper frog. The female is the one that quacks having a high pitched oft repeated quack of low volume.

**HABITS**—This colorful little duck is rated by the eyes of many to be second in charm and beauty only to the gorgeous wood-duck. They have a courtship of dignity rather than exertive bodily combat. Actual fighting between the males for the charms of a female is not reported in the literature. They seem rather to vie with one another in matters of elegance of movement until the female has made her choice. This is in contrast to the fighting that often takes place between males of the blue-winged teal before the female makes her choice. Courtship fights are also reported between males of the cinnamon teal.

The nest is apparently located in a large variety of situations, being frequently found long distances from water. Occasionally it is placed in the tall grasses near the border of some lake or slough. It is built in a hollow in the ground lined with soft grasses, leaves and down from the hen's breast. As incubation pro-

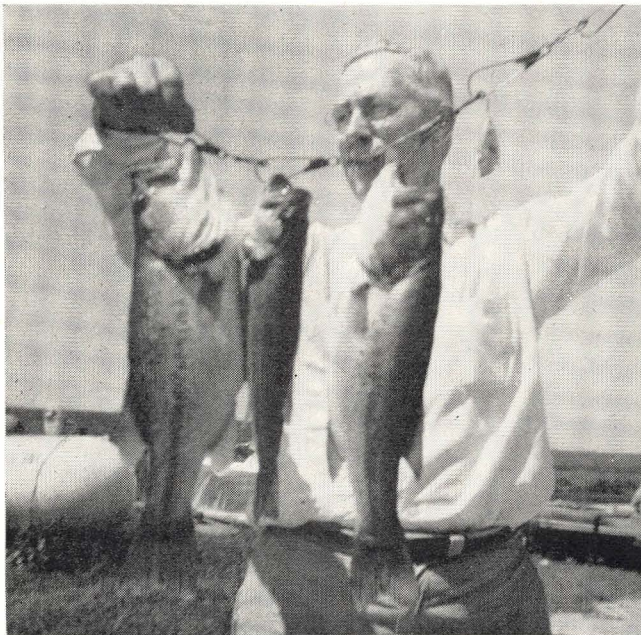


ceeds, more down is added which covers the eggs keeping them warm during the female's absence from the nest. They are prolific birds, as are most of our game birds, and as many as 18 eggs may be laid.

Teal are surface feeding ducks and prefer shallow ponds, sloughs and marshy areas, often alkaline in nature. They feed by tipping up and reaching down to the shallow bottoms to sift their food from the mud. They also eat seed and vegetation from the plants that flourish in the shallow water. They are active on land and may wander a considerable distance from water in search of foods such as berries and nuts. An estimated nine-tenths of this duck's food is vegetable matter.

From the standpoint of edibility, the teal are excelled by no other duck. Their flesh is rated as the last word in gastronomic delicacies, duckwise. This duck, being small, is often cooked whole and an entire duck offered as each helping.

It, too, is valued highly by sportsmen. Although they decoy readily their flight is so erratic and fast that they provide a real test of the gunner's skill. More than once have I had the personal experience of firing at the lead duck of a flight of these teal coming in fast over the decoys only to have one or more fall out far back in the flock. This truly indicated the terrific speed at which they were traveling and the inadequate lead I had given the shot. Some writers have credited this bird to travel at a speed of 160 miles an hour, but this undoubtedly is an exaggeration. Their diminutive size gives the illusion of a flight even faster than it really is.



**Earl Payne** of Wichita strung these three nice bass while fishing in Woodson County State Lake on August 16. The largest weighed three pounds.

## Carp for Sport

By OLIVER J. GASSWINT, *Biologist*

The German carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, is a much maligned and frequently misunderstood species. Being an extremely tolerant fish and one that is prolific and grows fast, the carp has been raised in captivity for centuries as a source of food in Asia and Europe.

This species was introduced from Europe into North America and was first brought to Kansas in 1880. It is now one of our most abundant fish. Control, except in small areas and for limited periods of time, is expensive and often impractical.

With carp as an "established fact," our present problem is to learn to live with this fish. In recent years, many Kansas fishermen have "discovered" carp, both for their eating and sporting qualities. Your author first became interested in carp as a sport-fish when he first turned to light tackle soon after W. W. II.

For bull-headed determination, the carp is one of the strongest fighters among warm water fish. On light tackle, the carp will often surface, although it seldom jumps clear of the water.

Contrary to popular belief, the carp is not a scavenger but a vegetarian. Except for earthworms and insects, the carp seldom feeds on other than vegetable matter.

In early spring and late fall when most Kansas streams carry a minimum of silt and the water is cool, the flesh of this fish is firm and sweet. Try it, you will be pleasantly surprised.

Fishing for carp is a challenge due to the wary nature and feeding habits of this species. The tender mouth is small in relation to the body size. Food is usually "mouthed" or sucked on before being swallowed. After the bait is picked up, the fish usually moves away and should the "victim" meet the slightest resistance, indicating something amiss, the bait is immediately dropped. This habit requires that the angler use the lightest of tackle and techniques not necessary for other species.

**TACKLE**—Spinning gear is made to order for carp fishing but conventional casting gear is suitable if properly rigged. Use your fly rod if you wish but take care, you may end up with a broken tip or worse. Hooks should be small, from number 6 to 1/0. I have two favorites, the Mustad O'Shaughnessy Shortshank for conventional casting gear and the Wright and McGill (eagle claw) Aberdeen Style for spinning gear.

With spinning tackle and fly rods, the weight of the bait may be sufficient for casting. If not, a couple of split shot or preferably a number 11 egg-sinker may be used. With casting gear, a sinker is a must. A ½ oz. or 1 oz. egg-sinker is usually adequate.



KANSAS BIRD LIFE . . . No. 11 in a series

Young Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) on nesting island at Cheyenne Bottoms

## Double-crested Cormorant

By DAVE COLEMAN

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The double-crested cormorant is a fairly common migrant in the spring and fall through those areas of Kansas that have large bodies of water. Authentically it has been recorded as nesting at only one place in the state—Cheyenne Bottoms in Barton County—but there is a possibility that it may nest in other areas.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The cormorant is not a well-known bird in Kansas and it sometimes falls prey to novice hunters who mistake it for a duck or goose. It is a rather large bird, measuring only a few inches less than three feet in total length and weighing about 4½ pounds. The plumage is largely black in color and the legs and webbed feet are dark also. The legs are short and are located well back on the body like those of a diving duck or grebe. The bill is yellow to dusky with the upper half showing

a decided hook at its end. The stiff, rounded tail extends well beyond the folded wings, and is used in walking and climbing. The cormorants belong to the same order of birds as do the pelicans, and possess a small throat pouch. This throat pouch is yellowish-orange in the double-crested species. During the breeding season these birds develop a set of curved black feathers on the top of the head—hence the name “double-crested.” Cormorants fly with their necks outstretched and the head held slightly above the horizontal. Their wingbeat is faster than that of a goose.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—Of the ten-or-so species of cormorants in North America this is the only one apt to be seen in Kansas. The Mexican cormorant (of Texas and southwestern Louisiana) has been reported as an accidental in the state. It is smaller and has

a duller color. The European cormorant that occurs in New England during the winter is larger and has a light yellow throat pouch. The size and solid black color distinguish the cormorant from waterfowl species. It lacks the long legs of the herons and their relatives.

**HABITS**—The cormorants are usually associated with a saltwater habitat, since most species are normally encountered along seacoasts. The birds that we find in Kansas are like their marine relatives in that they are gregarious by nature. This holds true even during the breeding season (a time when many birds are not tolerant of company). The birds in the photo above were produced in nests which in some cases were no more than one foot apart. The nesting site is usually an island or rocky ledge along the shore. A few weeds or twigs are formed into a nest on the ground and two to four pale, greenish-blue eggs are laid. The eggs have a slightly rough, chalky coating. The young are born blind and naked, but soon develop a heavy coat of dark down. They feed by poking their heads down the throats of their parents to obtain regurgitated parts of fish. When disturbed, the young birds also demonstrate this ability to regurgitate food and an intruder on one of their island rookeries gets an odoriferous reception.

A major portion of the cormorant's diet is fish. If a fish is caught in a position which makes swallowing it difficult, the bird may toss it deftly into the air and catch it with a more convenient hold. The strongly-hooked bill is ideally suited to holding the slippery prey. Cormorants are excellent underwater swimmers and can dive to great depths for their food if necessary. Both the webbed feet and the wings are used in swimming.

Cormorants have a habit of perching in an upright position on a rock or snag that is very characteristic. They often assume a "spread-eagle" pose, with wings half-extended as though they were trying to dry their feathers. The head is usually tilted upward at an angle, giving the bird a "nose-in-the-air" appearance. The bird rides low in the water when swimming and turns his up-tilted head quickly from one side to the other if he senses danger nearby.

**NOTES**—People have made use of the cormorant's fish-catching ability for centuries. Both in Europe and Asia they have been trained to catch fish and return them to their masters. The Chinese are most noted for using these birds. They place a leather collar around the bird's neck to prevent its swallowing the fish it catches. A string is attached to the collar and the bird is then sent underwater to start retrieving a tasty fish dinner.

Fishermen sometimes look upon cormorants as their enemies, believing that they consume large amounts of game fish. The literature does not bear out this idea and the writer found only carp being taken by these birds at Cheyenne Bottoms. Probably non-game species make up most of their diet in nearly all instances.



**The new Hamilton County State Lake** produced a surprise for John Dulin of Syracuse. On March 13, he landed this 11 $\frac{3}{4}$  pound channel while fishing with shrimp for bait. Since the lake has been stocked only two and one-half years, it is presumed that this big one probably grew in a farm pond above the lake and washed down during a period of high water.

# Kansas Bird Life

By DAVE COLEMAN



Young black-crowned night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) in nest at Cheyenne Bottoms.

**Black-crowned Night Heron** . . . No. 12 in a series

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—During migration, in April and again in November, black-crowned night herons are found throughout the state in the vicinity of streams, reservoirs, lakes and marshes. Through the summer, nesting birds may be found in scattered heronries over the state. The summer residents usually select an area with abundant shallow, shoreline water where they can search for food. Marshes are favored locations. Probably the central portion of Kansas normally has more nesting birds than other sections. This species has a wide distribution over the world, being found in Europe, Asia, Africa and most of the Western Hemisphere from central Canada through South America.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—This bird measures about 2 feet in total length and has a wingspan of slightly more than 3½ feet. It has the long, stout, sharp-pointed bill and fairly long legs of the heron family. Its feet, with three unwebbed toes in front and one behind, are adapted for alighting in trees when the bird wishes. The bill is black and the legs are yellow. The plumage varies from black on the top of the head (hence the name “black-crowned”) and upper part of the neck and the back, to ashy-gray on the wings, rump and tail, to white on the forehead, cheeks and undersides. During the breeding season there are a few slender, white, plume-like feathers extending rearward from the back of the head. The young birds are a rusty brown color heavily streaked and spotted with light gray. The second year they appear much like the mature birds, except for being somewhat grayer.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—The yellow-crowned night heron is the same size, but has a black head with a *whitish* crown, and a gray body. The bittern, similar to immature blackcrowns, has a black neck mark and usually stands with the bill pointed upward. Compared to other Kansas herons and to the egrets, the blackcrowns is a short-necked stocky bird.

**VOICE**—Members of the heron family are not noted for melodious voices, and the black-crowned night heron is no exception. The harsh-sounding “quawk” of this bird has led to him being called “qua bird” in some localities. The call is most often heard late in the evening as the bird flaps along through the darkening sky on his way to some favorite feeding spot. It may also be heard at times as he flushes before an intruder of the heavy marsh vegetation that he frequents during the day.

**HABITS**—Although this bird’s name implies that he is active mainly at night, this is not altogether true. Much of his food hunting is carried on at night, but it is not unusual to see him stepping quietly along through the water in the daytime, in search of a small fish, a frog, salamander, crawfish, aquatic insect or other tasty morsel. Small carp and crawfish are two of the staples of the blackcrowns’ diet at Cheyenne Bottoms. As the nesting season approaches, these herons spend quite a few of their daylight hours in finding suitable dry sticks or weed stems and carrying them to the spot chosen for nest building.

Blackcrowns do not migrate in large flocks as do the cranes and geese, but rather seem to prefer to do their moving in small groups. When the nesting season

rolls around, though, they become quite gregarious and as many as 200 or 300 pairs may nest in an area of less than 10 acres. When a secluded grove of trees is located near choice feeding grounds, the black-crowns may build their nests among the tree branches. Other times, they build their nests over the water in heavy stands of marsh plants. Those at Cheyenne Bottoms normally construct their nests far from shore and just over the water's surface, attaching them to stems of bulrush or cattail for support. Dried weed stems are the favorite nest-building material at this particular location. Two to four pale blue, smooth-coated eggs make up the clutch. The young birds are fed regurgitated food while they are small.

Although I have not observed black-crowns nesting before June at Cheyenne Bottoms, it is quite possible that nesting in Kansas may commonly get underway before this. Some pairs raise two broods in a summer, and I have seen flightless young in the nests as late as the second week in September.

### Things You May Not Know

Some snakes have been known to live from one to two years without food by absorbing the fat in their own bodies.

Butterflies can tell differences in the sweetness of liquids that taste alike to human beings.

Insects have no lungs. They breathe through tubes running all through their bodies.

The only animal that is purple in color is the blesbok, a small South African antelope.

The pelican derives its name from the Greek. It has a huge beak shaped like a great Greek *pelekus*, an ax.

An elephant's trunk contains 40,000 muscles and can perform more services than any other animal part except the human hand.

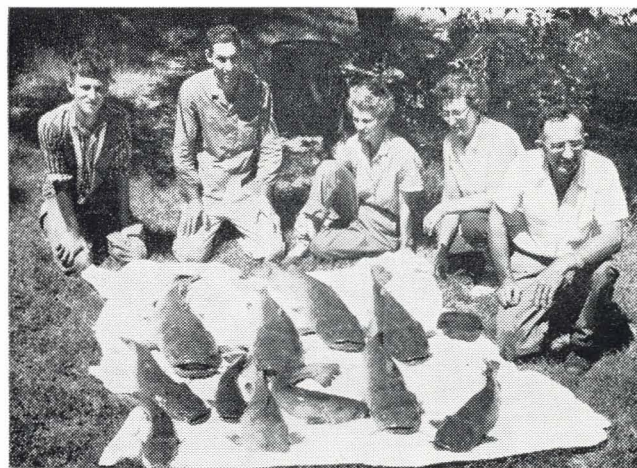
Bobwhite quail are found in small coveys and prefer fairly open, cultivated or pasture land with patches of brush for shelter.



**This 40-pound flathead** grabbed a small sunfish and was promptly boated by the two pictured anglers. They are L. C. Bork and Tom Penrose, both of Wichita, who took the giant "cat" below Fall River Reservoir dam. October 10th of last year was the date of the catch.

One jack rabbit for every five to ten acres of land is usually considered a high population. Individual home ranges of the animals are often larger.

The water shrew can literally run across the surface of a quiet pool of water because of air bubbles in its feet.



**The Smoky Hill** river maintained its reputation as a good flathead stream for this group of fishermen. Top weight for the catch was a 30-pounder. Pictured from left to right are: Bob Klein, Floyd Becker, Mrs. E. I. Klein, all of Moundridge, and Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Klein of Wellington. The party used bank lines and six-inch carp for bait.

# Kansas Bird Life

By **DAVE COLEMAN**



Pair of shovellers (*Spatula clypeata*) in breeding plumage.

Photo by Gebhard.

**SHOVELLER** . . . No. 13 in a series

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The shoveller, or “spoon-bill” as he is more commonly known to the Kansas duck hunter, is one of our more common migrants, moving through this state mainly in October and again in March and April. During the height of the spring or fall migration one can expect to find the shoveller throughout the state, some of their favorite haunts being sloughs, marshes, muddy ponds, and mud-bottomed shallow lakes and streams. Although many spoonies remain in Kansas well into spring, only a very few nest here. A few nests have been reported from central and southwestern Kansas. The bird is also rare in this state during the winter.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The shoveller is a well-named duck. His genus name, *Spatula*, means “spoon,” and the large spoon-shaped bill which this species possesses is the best single identifying feature during all seasons. The spoonie is a medium-sized duck, larger than a teal but smaller than a mallard or pintail, and weighing in the neighborhood of one and one-fourth to one and one-half pounds. In the spring the male shoveller is a gaudy drake indeed, with his dark green head, white chest, chestnut red sides and belly, orange-red legs and blue wing patches. Don't look for this colorful drake in October when you are out gunning, however. Then he wears a plumage much like the drab female, having an over-all mottled gray-brown appearance. As winter approaches the male's plumage will change gradually to the bright pattern that distinguishes him in the spring. The bill of the shoveller is long and widened toward the end. It is longer than the head, and so large that it tends to give the bird an overbalanced appearance and to make the wings in flight appear

to be set far back. The bill is equipped with bristle-like strainers along its edges. These serve to sift food from the water and bottom ooze as this puddle duck feeds. These birds ride low on the water with bills pointing downward. In feeding they may swim slowly through the water with bills half submerged, or tip up like other puddle ducks.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—No other duck has a bill comparable to that of the shoveller. In flight its blue shoulder patches might lead the novice to confuse it with the blue-winger teal, but the larger size and big bill will distinguish it. Hunters sometimes mistake the female (or male in eclipse plumage) for a hen mallard.

**VOICE**—The female utters a quack somewhat like the mallard hen but more feeble and raspy. The male is usually silent except during the breeding season when he gives forth with some guttural clucks and rattles.

**HABITS**—Spoonies usually fly in small flocks. When alarmed they can move rapidly, flying somewhat in the erratic fashion of teal at speeds of 40 to 55 miles per hour. This bird can arise nearly vertically from the water, and is known for the rattling sound made by its wings when alighting or taking off. It often decoys well, and is a common duck in the hunter's bag during the early part of the season.

Shovellers frequent marshlands and shallow ponds, seldom being seen in any numbers on large deep lakes with little vegetation. Some of the more common foods used by this species are the seeds of sedges, smartweeds, pondweeds and grasses, algae, plant roots, and animal matter such as insects and their larvae, crayfish, mollusks and fish. Those individuals which feed mostly on animal matter do not develop

very edible flesh, and for this reason many sportsmen avoid this species as a bird for the table. Many spoonies, though, are fairly good eating, providing meat no more strongly flavored than that of several other ducks.

The spoonbill nests on land, usually in grassy cover. The nest may be close to water or well back on the dry prairie. The normal clutch consists of 10 to 12 eggs of a pale olive-buff color. Incubation takes about 23 days. The female is left with the full responsibility of incubation of the eggs and rearing of the young, as in most species of ducks, while the male goes off to join other drakes and begin his molt. It is not uncommon for one female to have two male suitors in attendance during the breeding season. This is a rather unusual situation in the bird world, but apparently it suits the shoveller.

### On Our Cover

This picture illustrates the fact that you don't need a blind to hunt doves. It also points up the fact that you don't have to walk your legs off to get birds. Just find a pond or water hole and sit down; they'll come to you.

Dove hunting is finding more participants each year and populations are still on the increase. The liberal season and bag limit this year induced many to give this sport a try.

Although you can't see the dove in this photo, you can take our word that it was there. The fellow behind the gun is Fred Warders of the Forestry, Fish and Game Commission staff. The picture was snapped in late evening just before sundown using a Speed graphic with super pan press, type B. Exposure was at 1/100 with a lense opening of *f*-16. (Photo by George Valyer.)

### Pictures Needed

Have you caught a fish as big as those you see pictured in KANSAS FISH AND GAME? Maybe you had extra fine success during a hunt. Well, take a picture! The editor is always on the lookout for good fishing, hunting or outdoor pictures. Just send them to Publicity Division, Kansas Forestry, Fish and Game Commission, Box 581, Pratt, Kansas.

Of course we can't promise to publish all pictures sent in but we will do our best to include all those with a universal appeal. Time does not permit us to acknowledge receipt of all materials received but you can be certain they will be appreciated.

Be sure to give complete details with each picture submitted.

### Whoopers Set to Fly Again

Nearly every sportsman in Kansas has, by now, heard of the whooping crane. With today's modern communication facilities, there is certainly no excuse for anyone to be ignorant of this great white bird and its fight for existence.

The months of October and November mark the fall migration of whoopers from the nesting lands in the north to the wintering grounds in Texas. This means that the whoopers will pass through our state at almost any time in those months and, of course, sportsmen should be on the lookout for them.

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is asking help again this year to spot the flight of whoopers as they pass through the central part of the country. This will be the second year for the definite logging of the southward migration. Any person seeing a big white bird with black wing tips, a wingspread of from five to seven feet and a length of about five feet from head to foot should relay the information to their nearest game protector, the headquarters of the Fish and Game Commission or the nearest employee of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The birds usually migrate in small groups, sometimes in pairs and on rare instances, alone. Coloration of the young whooping cranes hatched this year is not white but a brownish-gray. The young are almost always in the company of two or more adults. The purpose of logging the flight is two-fold. It affords better protection for the birds on the current flight and it gives migration information which can aid in implementing future flights.

Last winter there were 39 whooping cranes known to be in existence. Of these, 33 were wild and had spent the winter at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas and on coastal islands nearby. Of the six birds in captivity, five were in the New Orleans zoo and the sixth was at the zoo in San Antonio. Only 31 whoopers migrated north this year, two choosing to remain on or near the Aransas refuge. Reports from Canada indicate that four young whoopers have been sighted during the summer.

Whooping cranes nest in Wood Buffalo Park, just south of Great Slave Lake in Canada, about 2,500 miles from their wintering ground. Arrival of the birds at Aransas ranges from early October to mid-December.

The voice of the mountain lion has long been a subject of controversy. However, experts believe their calls are similar to those of a house cat but magnified many times in volume and depth of tone.

## HORNED OWL . . .

No. 14 in a series

# Kansas Bird Life



By DAVE COLEMAN

HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*)

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The horned owl, sometimes known as “hoot owl” or “cat owl,” is a year-round resident throughout most of the state. The subspecies found in eastern Kansas is properly called the great horned owl; that of the western portion is classified as the Montana horned owl. There are only minor differences between the subspecies.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The horned owl is the only large Kansas owl (total length 18-25 inches) with “horns”—tufts of feathers at either side of the top of the head. This bird has a wingspread of nearly five feet, and flies with a few flaps followed by a smooth glide. The over-all color of the plumage is a mixture of sooty brown, tawny, white and gray. The back is darker, but even the lighter underparts are heavily

barred with brown except for a white throat patch. The yellow-colored eyes are large and prominent. The legs and feet are fully feathered, and the talons are long and needle sharp.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—The long-eared owl has prominent ear tufts, but is only about the size of a crow. Its underparts show lengthwise streaking rather than crosswise barring. Other Kansas owls lack ear tufts or are of a small size.

**VOICE**—The average person knows the horned owl better by sound than by sight. The hooting of these birds is especially noticeable during the mating season of January and February. The usual call is a five-noted series of hoots, sounded in a low resonant voice—hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo.



**HABITS**—Horned owls normally are associated with timbered areas, but in the plains they may sometimes be found on grassy hummocks or rocky cliffs. For a nesting site they commonly select an abandoned hawk or crow nest, a hollow tree, or a high rock ledge. It is not unusual for the female to be incubating her clutch of two or three white eggs while covered by a blanket of snow, for nesting begins in the cold of winter.

Small mammals make up the major portion of the average horned owl's diet. Mice, rats, rabbits, ground squirrels, tree squirrels, skunks and woodchucks are among the list of animals taken. Insects are frequently consumed when plentiful. Both game and non-game species of birds are eaten at times, and poultry is preyed upon when easily obtained. The owls have flight feathers with soft, tapered edges, enabling them to fly with very little noise. Slipping through the trees as silently as a shadow, they can strike unwary prey before their presence is known. These owls are active mainly from dusk until dawn, but occasionally fly about in bright daylight hours if flushed from their perch. Their vision is good both by day and by night, contrary to the popular belief that they can scarcely see in daylight.

Owls are pestered by crows and smaller daytime birds when discovered during the day, so they usually seek a secluded roosting spot such as an evergreen, a hardwood with heavy foliage, or a heavy growth of timber seldom visited by man or other birds. When hunting at dawn or dusk, they often use a very obvious perch such as a telephone pole, utility pole, fencepost, or dead tree in order to get a good view of the surrounding terrain.

**NOTES**—Because of his large size, great strength, and ferociousness when attacking, the horned owl has been called "the tiger of the air." His hunting call strikes terror into the hearts of small animals and other birds, and even gives an eerie feeling to the novice camper who does not know it well. The writer once heard of an unusual attack by a horned owl on a park ranger in the western mountains. This antagonistic bird swooped down upon the unsuspecting ranger as he walked across a clearing carrying a lantern. The force of the attack knocked the ranger to the ground, and his scalp was cut and scratched by the sharp talons. Such happenings are a rarity, however, and no doubt the work of a crazed individual. The average horned owl is a beneficial bird to man, destroying large numbers of destructive rodents. Only when this bird is found destroying poultry or game birds should he be eliminated. The acts of one individual which has acquired a taste for chickens, guineas, or young turkeys do not justify the indiscriminate killing of all birds of this species.



### Special Waterfowl Stamp Sale

Still underway is a special sale of the 1960-'61 Migratory Waterfowl Stamps, commonly known as "duck stamps" by most hunters. The sale was launched this year by the Department of Interior in an effort to provide more funds for the purchase of additional wetlands for use as breeding grounds for ducks and geese.

Marshlands in the main nesting areas of the United States are disappearing rapidly and, unless sportsmen and conservationists come to the aid of such areas, migratory waterfowl hunting may slowly disappear from the U. S. hunting scene.

This special sale offers to all persons the opportunity to have a hand in the acquisition of suitable marshlands through purchase of one of these \$3 stamps. The reward for supporters of conservation who make stamp purchases will be a certificate signed by the secretary of the interior and the satisfaction gained from knowing that the contributed amount is an investment which will pay dividends to the sportsman of tomorrow. The certificate, suitable for framing, has a space on which the stamp may be mounted.

Checks or money orders for these stamps should be sent to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington 25, D. C.

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The ermine, the ptarmigan, the Arctic fox and the varying hare change their fur or plumage to white in the winter.

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The orange coloring in a prairie dog's eyes permits him to withstand the intense glare of the sun.

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The teeth of rodents never stop growing, but they are kept worn down by gnawing.

# Kansas' Dry Land Ducks

## Many People Still Call Them Doves

by BOB TODD

Some people call it dove hunting, and others call it dry land duck shooting. Regardless what you call it, shooting at a fast moving dove is sport enough for any bird hunter.

Dove hunting in Kansas is picking up in popularity every season and this season promises to have more dove hunters than ever before.

Why hunt doves? Hunters give many reasons. One reason is to improve the old hunting eye before duck season comes along. Another reason is for food. The dove is rated as good and sometimes better than quail as a dish by many hunters who have eaten both. Still another reason given is to teach junior the art and skill of hunting. The younger set is generally a little too short on patience to enjoy tramping for miles in hope of flushing a covey of quail. But in dove hunting, when the action is moving, it is moving fast and continuous.

The best reason given for hunting doves, however, is still just for the pleasure of fast moving shooting. Since dove hunting is an exciting sport, and since the dove is abundant over most all of Kansas, it is easy to understand why the sport is picking up so rapidly in popularity.

The dove is a fast moving creature and very mobile. Where as quail seldom range over more than a quarter section or so, the dove thinks nothing of flying two or three miles just for a drink of water. And when the wind is right, a dove can cover that distance in two or three minutes.

Trying to tag a dove with a load of number six shot at 60 miles per hour is a challenge to any man's shooting skill.

Dove hunting is much like duck hunting in many ways, and since both types of birds are migratory, dry land duck hunting is a fitting description of the sport.

While a blind is nice and often built, similar to a land based duck blind, it is not a "must" item. However, some concealment is needed. Get behind a scrub bush or just sit still and wear clothes that will make you blend with the scenery.

The best dove hunting is usually in the late evening or early morning. From one-half hour before sunrise



to sunset is legal. It is at these times that the most flying takes place in the life of a dove. Doves have a habit of taking a morning drink soon after sunrise and an evening drink before heading for the roost. During the day, the dove is more or less stationary. He may feed some or just sit on a telephone wire.

But in the morning and evening, the dove is tending to all the chores that keep him on the wing. He is racing to a field to stuff himself on weed and grass seeds—then racing to a water hole or pond somewhere for an evening drink—then he is racing back to the roost to get comfortable before night sets in.

Water holes are favorite spots for dove hunters. In the late evening the doves pour into the water holes and they come from all directions, flying at all speeds and dipping and diving like a jet fighter with an acrobat at the controls.

A man can hunch down behind a bush and shoot as they come in. The shots frequently come so fast that a box of shells lasts only 15 or 20 minutes. Some hunters report they have to stop until their gun barrel cools down. When the birds are coming in for the night's roost, the shooting is similar to that at a farm pond or other water hole.



A pair of these dry land ducks, or doves if you prefer, can whiz past you at 60 miles per hour with a tail wind. At that speed and with their erratic flight pattern, the dove leaves the classification of the poor man's game bird. A box of shotgun shells often lasts only 15 or 20 minutes and some hunters say they have to stop shooting every so often to let their gun barrel cool off.

Some hunters prefer to locate a roosting area and a water hole used by the doves. Then they hunker down in a field somewhere in between and wait for the doves to fly over. The flight of the doves is still erratic in this case, but not so hectic as at a water hole or roosting site. The attraction in the open field is that of speed. With a tailwind, a dove can fly 60 miles per hour without a great deal of effort.

Regardless which you prefer, it is a good idea to go out and scout up some good locations before the season opens. Since doves are abundant all over Kansas, you won't have to go far. Just ride around in the country along about dusk for several evenings. When you have located several places that appear to be good hunting areas, get permission from the land owner to hunt. That way, you will be in business when the season opens.

Doves are migratory, ranging from Canada to Panama. For this reason, most of the management of doves is carried on by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in co-operation with the states. Kan-

sas is in the central division. According to the census in this section, Kansas showed a population index rise of 1.9 percent this year. That is, where there were about 100 birds last year, there are about 102 this year. However, in the over-all division, the population index is down 10 percent. However, even this is 52 percent above the population of 1953, the year used for comparison.

This year's season, September 1 to October 30, is based on the figures used above and Fish and Wildlife Service directive. The bag limit and possession limit also remain the same as last year, 15 per day, 30 in possession.

In short, hunters last year did not shoot as many doves as they could have without hurting the population. And indications are that there will be more than enough to go around again this year. So if you want to sharpen up your eye for the duck season, put in some good eating, teach junior to hunt or just plain want to get in on some of the hottest bird shooting going, give dove hunting a try.

# *Kansas Bird Life*

## BOBWHITE QUAIL

by Dave Coleman

**WHERE FOUND IN KANSAS**—The popular bobwhite is found throughout the Sunflower State, being very common in the eastern portions of the state but decreasing toward the western limits to be found only in choice local habitat. Since bobwhites are not migratory they are present at all seasons, the population varying with the time of year. There are two subspecies in our state, but the differences between them are slight. In some sagebrush lands of the southwestern counties this species may be outnumbered by another Kansas quail, the scaled or blue quail.

**IDENTIFYING CHARACTERISTICS**—The bobwhite is about the size of a meadowlark, with plump body, short neck and bill, stubby rounded wings, and short legs and tail. In total length he normally varies from 8-10 inches, and his average weight in Kansas is about 7 ounces. The bobwhite's plumage presents a mixed pattern of brown, chestnut, buff, black, and white. The back and wings are made up of the darker colors while the underparts are white or light gray-buff mottled with dark brown. The male is distinguished from the female by his white throat patch and eye stripe. These areas are buff colored on the female. The all-purpose bill is rather stout and somewhat hooked, being suited both for catching insects and for feeding on weed seeds or grain. The feet are adapted for scratching, as are those of the other members of this family of birds. The feathers of the top of the head are somewhat erectile,



A pair of Bobwhite Quail (*Colinus virginianus*). Male left, female right.

and when the bobwhite is alarmed, curious or antagonistic he often raises them, creating a top-knot effect. Other than the well-known call, probably one of the best identifying characteristics of this bird is his flight. He bursts from cover with great speed and a whirring of wings that few birds can equal. When a covey of these fine game birds erupts at the feet of a startled hunter, he often is so surprised and befuddled that he cannot fire a single shot before they have rocketed out of range.

**SIMILAR SPECIES**—Kansas has no species of bird which is very similar to the bobwhite. Perhaps the meadowlark is confused with the bobwhite as much as any species, but its yellow breast, white tail feathers and slower flight mark it as different. The scaled quail of southwestern Kansas is a uniform slate gray in color. Mockingbirds and starlings sometimes mimic the call of the bobwhite.

**VOICE**—The bobwhite acquired his name because of his distinctive call. The familiar "ah-bob-white" is heard from early spring until late summer when nesting ceases. The beginning note is low and not audible for any distance, but the "bob-white" rings out loud and

clear for all to hear. This is the mating call of the male. Bobwhites also utter other calls to express alarm or to aid them in re-assembling when they have been dispersed from their covey unit. The chicks give forth with a plaintive peeping when separated from their family.

**HABITS**—Bobwhites generally are birds of farmlands and thickets. They prefer a mixture of grass, cropland, weeds, and brush or trees in their home range. Choice environment has some source of drinking water, in addition to a good supply of food and cover. Except during the mating and nesting season the bobwhite is a gregarious bird, grouping together in coveys. A covey may contain only members of one family, or the combination of two or more families and stray birds. Normally the covey ranges over a limited area only, seldom travelling more than half-a-mile from their favorite roosting site. They roost in a compact circular group with heads facing to the outside. Usual feeding times are morning and evening, with midday being spent in loafing, preening and dusting.

The mating season begins with the breakup of the winter coveys,