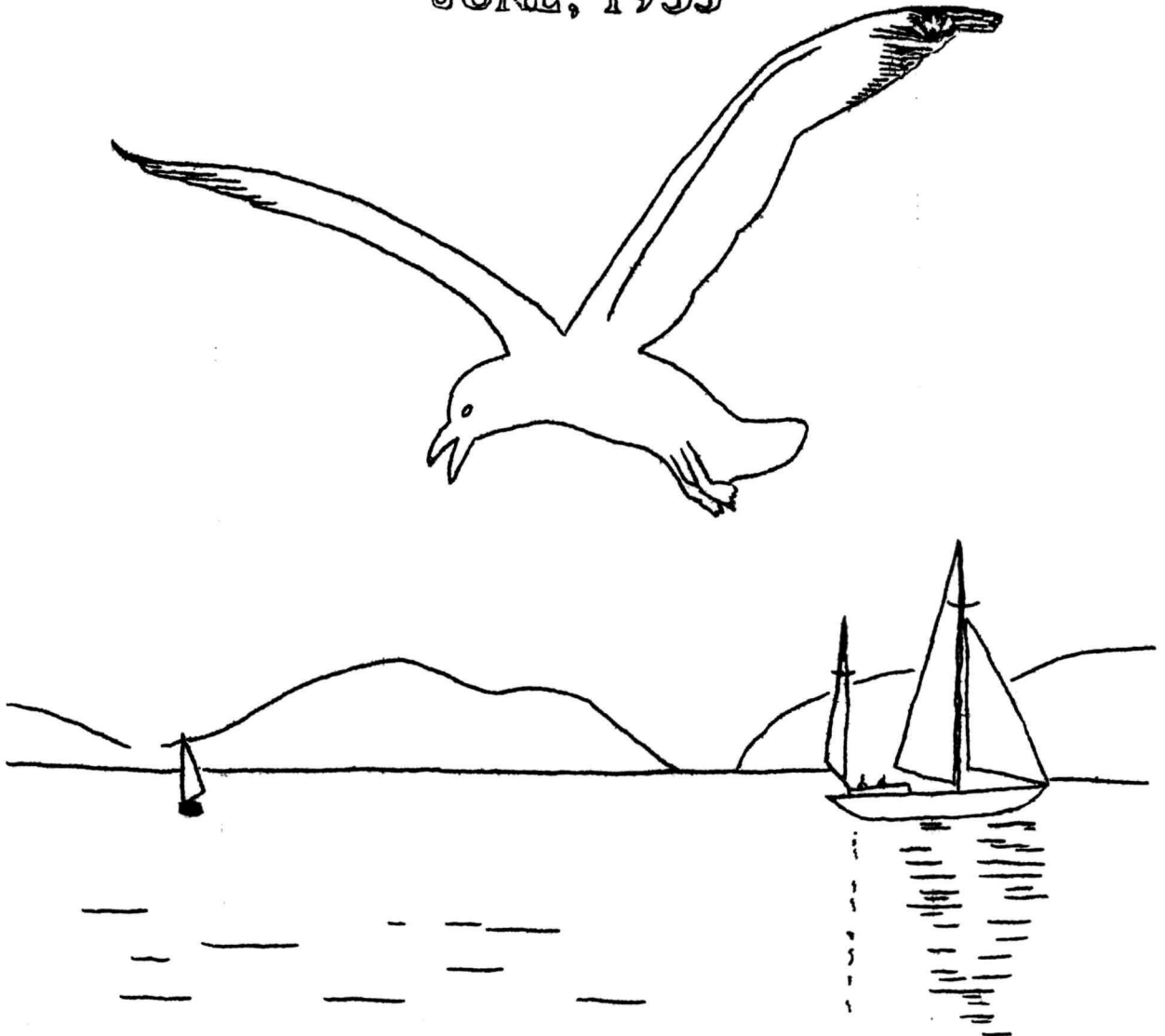


NATURE NOTES FROM ACADIA

VOL.2

JUNE, 1933

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ACADIA NATIONAL PARK
BAR HARBOR, MAINE

Department of the Interior

National Park Service

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NATURE NOTES FROM ACADIA

Volume 2

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This bulletin is issued during the months when Ranger-Naturalist services are offered in Acadia National Park. Its purpose is to make those who are interested in Acadia better acquainted with its plant and animal life and with its geologic story. Publications wishing to use these notes should give credit to Nature Notes from Acadia.

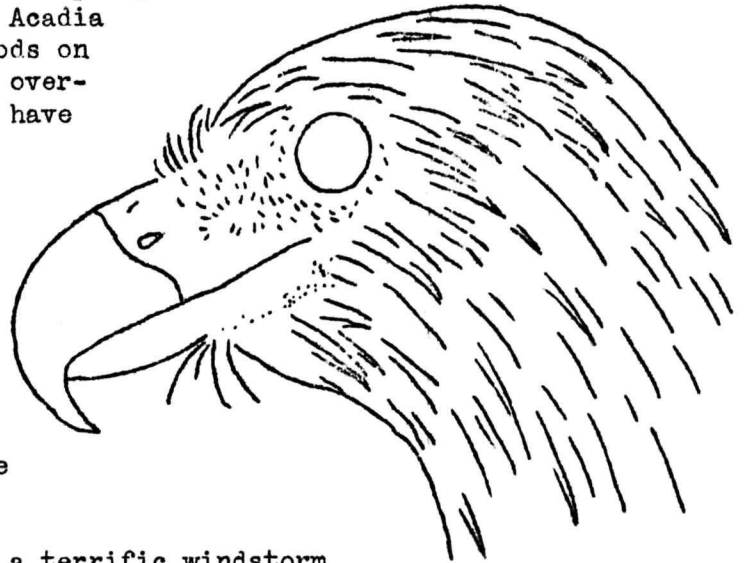
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BALD EAGLES AND AN ILL WIND

On the ninth day of June Mr. O. Y. Thompson, expert woodsman and permanent ranger in Acadia National Park, guided me through the woods on Beech Hill to the eyrie of a bald eagle overlooking Long Pond. The nest which must have been several years old was saddled in the crown of a dead yellow birch about 35 or 40 feet from the ground. We were unable to view the contents of the big nest, but indications were that it was occupied by young birds. Ordinarily the eaglets on Mt. Desert Island do not leave their home before early July, and I therefore planned to return within the period of a few days since it was my desire to photograph the nestlings.



That night the island was swept by a terrific windstorm which lashed the trees like some gigantic flail in the hands of the night wind. Large trees were uprooted or broken and limbs of all sizes littered the ground in wooded regions. Some of the venerable poplars which had been growing on the Village Green in Bar Harbor went down in the gale.

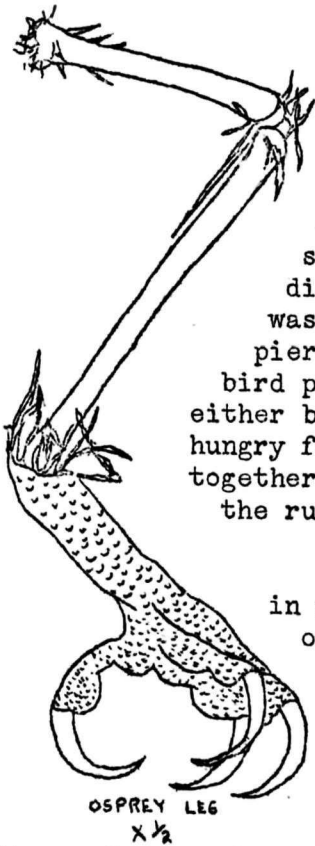
The eyrie on Beech Hill had weathered many a storm, but this one proved too much for it. As the years had gone by the load borne by the weakening dead birch through additions made to the nest by the white-headed eagles had grown greater and greater. Like all such mighty structures, this one was doomed. But it was not until nine days after the fierce storm that I was able to return to the region of the big nest, and it was not until then that I discovered the tragedy.

Upon my return to Beech Hill on the morning of June 18, accompanied by Mr. Vernon Lunt of Indian Point, I was quite amazed to find that the dead yellow birch which held the nest had crashed, broken off by the wind at a point about ten feet from the ground. My companion soon found the unfortunate feathered occupants - two eaglets drenched by the night's rain; one was dead, the other, its wing badly injured, stood humped up beside the lifeless nestmate only a few feet from the ruins of the nest. In all probability they had been on the ground for nine days and nights and to look at them was to look at a veritable scene of woe.

So dense was the woodland in the immediate vicinity of the eyrie that the adult eagles in all probability had been unable to reach and feed their charges. They had not deserted the scene of the tragedy altogether, however, since we heard one of them when but a short distance from the fallen birch. Whether the impact of the fall accounted directly or indirectly for the death of one of the nestlings was impossible to determine. Examination of the body led me to believe that the bird may have succumbed to starvation, and this belief was strengthened upon failure to find remains of animal food of any kind near the body.

(continued on next page)

What clues as to the food habits of this family of bald eagles did the nest contain? Eagerly my companion and I set about to pull apart the fallen structure. Remains of a crow, the wing of a black duck, the skulls and wings of five herring gulls, remains of several fishes including flounders and a sculpin, and a portion of the leg of a full-grown deer were found. Examination of the last-named item brought us to the conclusion that it had been severed from the animal by human hands, discarded, and later found by the hunting eagle and carried off to its nest. But what interested me most was the finding of three legs which I later identified as belonging to ospreys. It is common knowledge that the bald eagle robs the fish hawk of its prey, but here was evidence that the king of birds at times will rob this large hawk of its life. Perhaps these individuals refused to yield their finny prey - it must have been a grand spectacle this battle of the winged predators in the sky.



What to do with the injured survivor of the crash? The bird, now perhaps two months of age, had been watching our examination of the big nest with apparent interest. Making no effort to leave the scene of this tragedy, he tolerated our stroking of his wet feathers with some reluctance. The bird had suffered a severe fracture at the bend of the right wing and a dislocation at the terminal portion of the same appendage. He was hungry, drenched, and cold, but in his dark eyes was that piercing sparkle which makes for a splendid dignity in our diurnal bird predators. To leave him in the woods was to leave him to die, either by starvation and exposure or by the teeth of some overbold hungry fox. But we did not deliberate long, and after having gathered together all the food remains which had been found in the nest, we left the ruins with an injured eaglet as our grand prize.

For two days and nights the big bird was kept close to the stove in my house. Here he received a thorough and much-needed drying out and ate more or less heartily of fresh uncooked steak, fish, and eels, all of which were cut into small pieces before being offered to him. His condition on the second night of captivity became such that we feared the bird would not be found alive next morning, but to our pleasant surprise the health of our captive began to improve. He seemed to thrive on his diet of fish, raw beef, and fresh liver. A local veterinarian to whom the eaglet was brought for examination on the second day expressed considerable doubt regarding future possibility of flight.

By the end of June my captive had grown considerably stronger. When hungry he whistles for food, and after his appetite has been satiated he twitters in an unmistakably satisfied sort of way. He has learned to drink, showing an early fondness for water. Occasionally he exercises his wings. My wife and I have become very fond of our charge. We hope that the veterinarian was wrong and that some day the unfortunate eaglet will be able to soar on sturdy wings.

- Ranger-Naturalist

THE PLENTITUDE OF LIFE

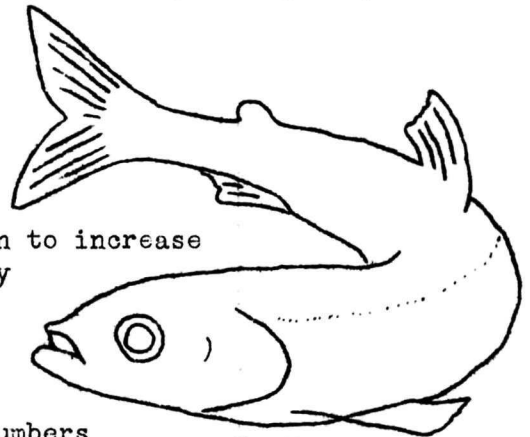
"So careful of the type, she seems,
So careless of the single life."
- Tennyson

In May, when the smelts are spawning in certain of the streams on Mt. Desert Island, one who observes this truly remarkable phenomenon cannot help but be impressed by it. The small greenish-backed fish begin their up-stream journey early in the night, when suddenly schools of them appear and begin to ascend the shallow brooks. The submerged rocks over which they pass become coated with the spawn of this determined finny multitude. So great do their numbers become that the onlooker would experience no difficulty in scooping up as many handfuls of the slender-bodied silvery-sided creatures as he might desire. Favored both as a choice food fish as well as excellent bait for the larger game fishes, the smelt is sought after by many.

The countless numbers of eggs which this one kind of fish alone deposits - what becomes of them? It would be safe to say that if but one-half of the eggs were successfully hatched, and then if but one-half of these young reached maturity our streams, within the period of a few years, could not hold the unbelievably great numbers of smelts. Such a situation, however, does not arise. The odds against any form of wild life whose progeny is great in number are correspondingly great.

In the spring our frogs and toads take to the water where the females lay from a few hundred to a few thousand eggs. These masses of potential life are deposited in shallow pools which not infrequently dry out leaving the egg clusters stranded. Then, too, various forms of life are known to prey upon the eggs. Those tadpoles which finally wriggle free of the gelatinous mass wherein they were cradled find a host of enemies both in the water as well as upon the land, and the ones of their number which are able to successfully run the gauntlet of hostile predators are few indeed. It is no wonder that their kind does not become noticeably greater in numbers as the years go by.

The herring will lay many thousands of eggs while the cod, the oyster, and certain starfishes are known to deposit millions. Orchids produce great numbers of fine seeds and certain of our puff-balls release myriads of dust-like spores. Yet, in spite of this great reproductivity the numbers of the various animals and plants remain at a remarkable level over a long period of years. Certain animals, like the lemmings and rabbits of the far north are well known to increase periodically until their numbers become unbelievably great, but the pendulum of the so-called and non-existent "balance of nature" then begins the back-swing, and before long these animals become correspondingly few in number. So here too, in spite of pronounced fluctuations, a certain equilibrium in numbers is maintained. As the poet has implied, Nature, though seemingly careless of the individual, guards with utmost care the mold in which its form was cast, be it frog or flower, lemming or smelt. It is a part of the drama of the out-of-doors.



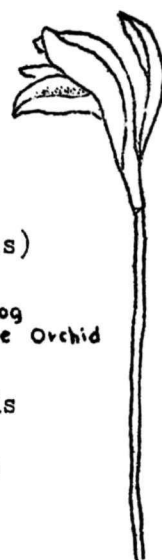
Smelt x1

SEAWALL HEATH IN EARLY JUNE

The abundance of plants of the heath family in the extensive bog near Seawall, in the southwestern part of Mt. Desert Island, makes its designation as a "heath" an appropriate one. A visit to this region in early June finds many of the heaths in flower. Rose-colored blossoms of the little Bog Laurel (*Kalmia polifolia*) are abundant while masses of *Rhodora* (*Rhodora canadensis*) grow close to the encroaching woodlands. The earliest flowers of Sheep Laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*) are out and the bog pools are fringed with the pink and white bell-like flowers of the Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). Flower buds on Labrador Tea (*Ledum groenlandicum*) and a few stray blossoms on the Leather-leaf (*Chamaedaphne calyculata*) place them among the six members of the heath family which are conspicuous in this bog in early June.



Bog
Rosemary

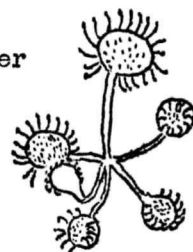


Bog
Rose Orchid

Of course there are members of many other plant families which grow here as well. Reindeer lichens (*Cladonia* sp.) and Sphagnum moss form an appreciable part of the soft bog carpet which in places is dotted with the soft white tufts of Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum* sp.). Pitcher Plants (*Sarracenia purpurea*) and Round-leafed Sundews (*Drosera rotundifolia*) are here in numbers while careful search will find the splendid Bog Rose Orchid (*Arethusa bulbosa*). In the pools the Yellow Pond Lily (*Nymphaea advena*) is in bloom while the Bog Solomonplume (*Vagnera trifolia*) bears its small racemes of attractive white flowers in the wet brushy thickets which encircle the open heath.



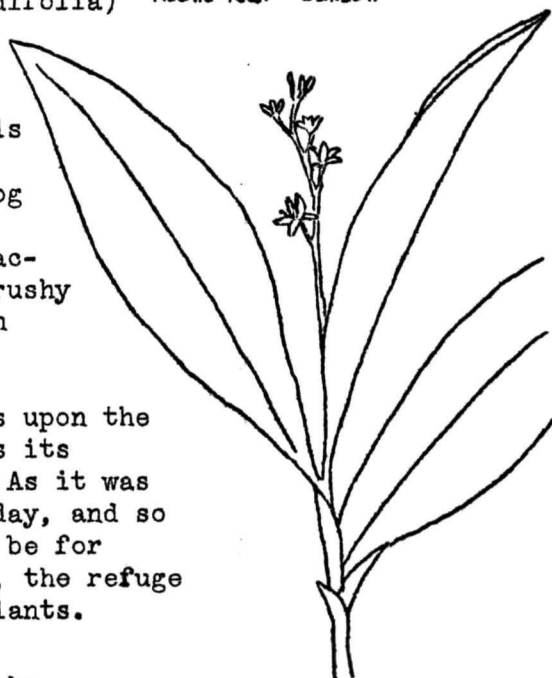
Bog
Laurel



Round-leaf
Sundew



Labrador Tea



Bog Solomonplume

Because man seldom ventures upon the sanctuary of the bog, it retains its primitive wildness and beauty. As it was many centuries ago, so it is today, and so let us hope it will continue to be for centuries to come - unexploited, the refuge of a host of interesting wild plants.

- Margaret Stupka

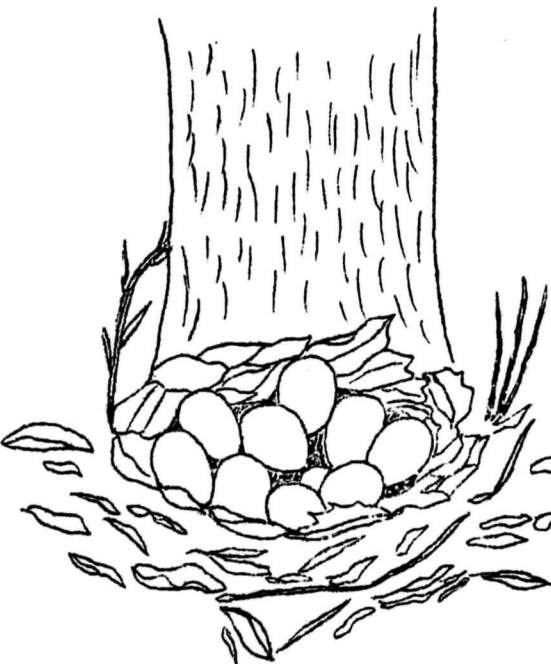
A WOODLAND DRUMMER

On the thirteenth day of May it was my good fortune to be directed to the nest and eggs of a ruffed grouse which had been discovered in a stand of mixed woods near the Anemone Cave region. Upon approaching to within a few yards of the nest site my companion and I flushed the rusty brown-colored mother bird and soon were looking at twelve buff-colored eggs which were clustered together in a leaf-lined bowl-shaped depression on the ground. I revisited the nest at three or four day intervals thereafter, until eighteen days later, on May 31, I noticed that two of the eggs were slightly cracked. On that day the incubating mother bird ran from the nest when I was only a very few feet away and complained against my intrusion from the nearby woods. The great event was apparently at hand, but on the following day there was no noticeable change.

On the afternoon of June 2, twenty days after my first look at the nest, my return was finally rewarded. The mother bird left when I was almost upon her, and a glance explained her unusual state of excitement. In the past twenty-four hours all but one of the eggs had hatched, and the new-born chicks were running in all directions as fast as their weak little legs could carry them. But having no intentions of so disrupting the family I hurriedly left the woods; the parent would soon return to lead her covey from the scene of many disturbances.

The ruffed grouse, often referred to as "partridge," lives up to its reputation as the king of our eastern game birds. It is partial to fairly dense mixed woodland where food and shelter are at hand. As with many other forms of wild life, the ruffed grouse has suffered due to excessive hunting and timber-cutting and today is found scattered throughout its range.

A wide variety of vegetable food comprises the diet of this game bird - fruit, seeds, berries and miscellaneous material such as buds, stems, leaves, catkins and blossoms making up 90% or more of the total amount consumed.



As in the rabbits, there are periodic fluctuations in the numbers of grouse. In the past few years the recovery from their decrease in numbers has been so meager in many sections of the country that certain ornithologists and sportsmen have become alarmed, and a committee has been formed to investigate the causes which might account for the scarcity of the birds. This committee has found the problem a complicated one and reports that "more than a dozen parasites and diseases of varying importance have been noted in the birds."

The muffled drumming of the ruffed grouse is a woodland note which belongs to our New England springtime. Much controversy has waged as to how the sound was produced, but photographs made of the drumming birds lead ornithologists to the statement that it is the result of the wings striking the air alone.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Herring Gulls. - So abundant is the herring gull that as far as birds are concerned, he is one which can well be used to symbolize Acadia National Park. At low tide this large gull haunts the ocean front, feeding on dead as well as living marine forms. Often he will pick up a mussel, rise to a point about 15 or 20 feet above the rocks, drop his prey, and swoop down to feed upon the broken remains. He and his kind will follow the fishing boats for miles, and during June they often make for the two Duck Islands which for years have been a favorite breeding grounds. Again they fly over Mt. Desert Island in picturesque formations heading for Jordan Pond, Eagle Lake, and other bodies of freshwater where they seem to delight in bathing.

- Louis Fowler
Temporary Ranger

A Baby White-tail. - On June 8 one of the men working on the Cadillac Mt. Road came upon the body of a very young fawn. It lay in a grassy spot in the woods and was brought immediately to the office of the Ranger-Naturalist. Examination of the animal pointed strongly to the probability that it either had been born dead or had died soon after birth. Its beautifully-spotted coat was in such prime condition that the specimen was rushed to a capable taxidermist who prepared a splendid mount. The baby white-tailed deer is now one of the choice objects in Acadia National Park's growing collection of natural history specimens.



Long-tailed Shrew. - Two live specimens of the Long-tailed Shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) were brought to the office of the Ranger-Naturalist during June. This animal is one of the very smallest of the fur-bearers native to Mt. Desert Island, the above illustration showing a full-grown specimen. In captivity it lives but a very short time, even when supplied with enough of the food on which it normally feeds. White grubs, large flies, earthworms, a spider, a wounded bald-faced hornet, and a few other items of food were consumed voraciously. Few animals are more savage than this midget in the dispatch of their prey.

- Ranger-Naturalist