

Nesting Project for Golden-eye Ducks

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GOLDEN-EYE and BUFFLE-HEAD DUCKS, MADGE LAKE

From a Provincial Museum mural, painted by Mr. Bard's assistant, Fred Lahrman.

The Goldeneye or Whistler is a beautiful duck although not too well known. To most people it is referred to as the Wood Duck because of its habit of nesting in cavities in trees about resorts bordering lakes. Often, those opening their cottages for the first time in the spring find the Golden-eye have established a nest in the chimney—this has occurred on many occasions.

Before the great drought of the thirties there was ample accommodation for nesting sites. The trees they used—mainly along the Qu'Appelle—were large elms. Now, fifteen or twenty years later, many of these trees have died and fallen down. The grazing cattle in the pasture lands bordering the lakes have prevented new elms from starting. The under-

brush is becoming quite cleared and the lack of accommodation is causing a congestion and a competition among the possible tree dwellers.

We realized this condition some time ago, and yet failed to take any necessary action until last spring. We acquired a number of nail kegs, cut a four inch hole in each and spray-painted them in camouflage colors. Numbering each, we placed ten of them in various locations along the lakeshore to the west of the area between Sifton and Gibbs.

Last year a Sparrow Hawk occupied one; down from a Golden-eye was found in another; two were occupied and eggs laid in them. Although we did not keep a close check on these ourselves, the success of



Albert Swanston, Provincial Museum assistant, examining Golden-eye duck eggs just removed from the keg, among the elm branches.

two was reported to us. Our success was not too good owing to the lateness of our installing the barrels. The Golden-eye Ducks establish themselves very early in the spring.

We had an opportunity of checking the barrels this spring, and found six of the ten occupied. In fact, two females were attempting to nest in the same keg.

The accompanying photographs demonstrate the success of these small conservation projects. Each of us who appreciates wildlife derives a great deal of pleasure in being able to assist Nature when the occasion makes it necessary to lend some assistance.

There is no reason why a hundred barrels or more could not be established along suitable nesting sites. There was one thing that prompted us to do something about it. Last summer we found an old elm in which

several Golden-eyes were attempting to nest. Through an opening in the side we were able to see a large collection of eggs, and on lifting them out, found that there were thirty-two. The forcefulness of this observation made us realize the necessity of doing something—and doing it quickly.

Near several other lakes along the Qu'Appelle, similar nesting kegs could be placed even in the vicinity of the cottages, but we feel a suggestion should be made at this time, and that is to label the barrel as an experimental Golden eye Duck project. This should be accompanied with a small notice asking the people not to interfere with the nesting birds. In this way we can do a great deal towards increasing the Golden-eye Duck population.

These birds are birds of the lakes. They are diving ducks, and do not in any way affect the farmer.