

Mallards do Dive

by Douglas E. Wade and Dorothy R. Wade, Regina

The phenomenon of Mallards diving has been witnessed this winter on the open waters of the Wascana Waterfowl Park in Regina by several observers. On December 13, 1960, we observed a group of six Mallards diving. On other visits—December 23, 25, 27 (1960) and January 1, 2 and 14 (1961)—we observed groups of Mallards diving. Dr. Isabel Coleman also observed the diving on December 26. Diving appeared to increase when the shallower water became iced over. Most of the 300 or more Mallards (both sexes) seen on January 2 were diving.

The Mallard dives awkwardly compared with the true divers. It throws up some splash behind as it works its way under. This splashing is distinctive. Using the method of counting from 101, 102, etc. to estimate the number of seconds, we noted that the time under water varied from one to 11 seconds, the most frequent being seven seconds. Times were checked for at least 50 Mallards. A hen Mallard held the record of 11 seconds, but several males were under at least 10 seconds. The longest distance travelled under water was estimated to be seven feet. The precise depth of water where the birds were diving was not determin-

ed, but we believe the depth varies from about 1½ to five feet.

Although we have not yet seen food in the bills of the diving Mallards, we believe the activity is associated with feeding. We have seen the tip-up or dabbling action going on in shallow water while Mallards in deeper water were diving. The presence of more than 600 Mallards wintering on the Wascana may have depleted the food supply in the shallow water.

A cursory examination of the literature reveals little information on the diving of Mallards. A. C. Bent in *Life Histories of North American Wild Fowl* (1923) states that "mallards . . . escape (enemies) by diving and clinging motionless to weeds more often than attempting to swim long distances under water." Another dabbler, the Gadwall, dives if necessary for food (R. Pough, *Audubon Water Bird Guide*, 1951, p. 81).

Present at the Wascana Waterfowl Park during December, 1960, and January, 1961, were such excellent divers as Buffleheads, Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneyes, and Pied-billed Grebes. Whether or not water birds learn certain activities by association has been little explored.

Apparent Escape Behaviour of a Red-Breasted Nuthatch

by R. W. Nero. Sask. Museum of Natural History.

The Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) was surprisingly uncommon in the Uranium City area of Saskatchewan during May, June and July, 1960. While walking along a lightly-forested ridge south of Lorado Uranium Mine on the morning of May 14 I heard its characteristic call from a solitary white spruce on a rocky slope supporting mainly aspen and jack pine. However, since this species had only been recorded a few times for the area I was anxious to identify it by sight. I came upon the nuthatch quite suddenly and evidently surprised it. At once, and before I could get a good look at it, it scrambled out of sight and was silent. I walked around the tree, squeaking on the back on my hand

to draw it out, but was unable to find it. Yet, since the tree stood quite by itself I was positive that the nuthatch had not flown. Suddenly I was surprised to see what appeared to be a dead bird, perfectly motionless and dangling from a horizontal branch about 12 feet above the ground. At first I felt sure that it was a dead warbler entrapped by its feet and hanging downward. I moved about the tree in some elation, thinking to secure a specimen, and in order to identify it first, raised my binoculars. At that precise moment the "dead" bird moved slightly, hardly altering its position, and at once I realised it was a nuthatch, hanging by its toes, head and neck downward at full length, with its breast facing me;