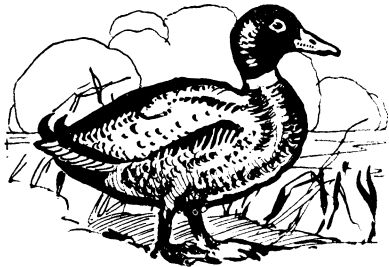


ORNITHOLOGY
**NATURE
 RAMBLINGS**
 by Frank Thone



Talking About Ducks

➤ EVERYBODY knows ducks. Everybody likes ducks. Many of us even know the differences between several kinds of ducks, whether we have followed them with a hunter's gun or a bird student's field-glasses and camera. After you've had them pointed out a few times, it isn't difficult to distinguish between a mallard and a teal, a pintail and an old-squaw.

But there are still a lot of duck facts that all of us can learn, with interest and probably with profit. A good place to find such duck data in complete but compact form is a new book by an outstanding Canadian field naturalist, Francis H. Kortright: *The Ducks, Geese and Swans of North America* (American Wildlife Institute, \$4.50).

Do you know, for example, how to tell whether the particular duck you have in hand is an adult or a juvenile bird? Here are three different criteria presented by Mr. Kortright: (1) If even one of the tail-feathers is square-ended or notched, your bird is a juvenile. If all tail-feathers are normally rounded off at the ends, it is likely to be an adult—though it still may be a juvenile that has just completed its tail molt. Shall we say, an adolescent duck? (2) Juvenile ducks usually have fine, narrow stripes, comb-fashion, at the very tips of their beaks; adults seldom have them. (3) Adults of species with bright feet usually have higher foot coloration than juveniles, at least in autumn. None of these three methods of differentiation is dependable by itself, but taken together they aid in making a determination.

Again: If during nesting season you should happen upon a flock of what look like female ducks sociably paddling around, don't jump to the conclusion

that here is a web-footed "hen party" neglecting their home duties. Most likely it's a lot of males in what is known as the eclipse molt. After the breeding period, says Mr. Kortright, drakes shed the conspicuous, festive plumage they wore during their courtship and their brief wedded life, and for a season go about in darker, soberer feathers, similar to the plumage of the females. Like grass-widowers who have decided to settle down to a spell of single independence, they are wearing old clothes

and hanging around with the gang at the club.

These and many other things of equal interest reward a dip into the first few pages of Mr. Kortright's book. The body of the text, of course, is devoted to description of the ducks and their relatives, species by species, with full accounts, in plain English, of their distribution and habits. And in addition to the many text illustrations there are 36 full color plates by T. M. Shortt.

Science News Letter, May 8, 1943



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