

NOTES ON THE HARLEQUIN DUCK

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On May 2, 1960, Jack S. Rothacher and John A. Booth of the Pacific Northwest Forest and Range Experiment Station, U. S. Forest Service, called my attention to a dead female harlequin duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*). It had drifted ashore in a large pool in Blue River near Camp Lucky Boy, the old Boy Scout camp on the west slope of the Cascades in eastern Lane County, Oregon. The duck had been dead only a short time and decomposition was not yet apparent. No external evidence of the cause of death was noted; however, internal examination revealed a very large bruise on the anterior portion of the breast. Fifty feet upstream from where the duck was found, a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cable stretches across Blue River about 20 feet above the water. Although no direct evidence was secured, it seems likely the duck may have killed herself by flying into the cable. Harlequin ducks have been observed flying at dusk when visibility is poor, so the accident could possibly have occurred at that time.

A fully formed egg was found intact in the oviduct of the bird; it is now at the Oregon State University Natural History Museum. The ovary had ova in various stages of development — one was nearly ready to be discharged. It seems logical to assume that the female was nesting in the vicinity of where she was found. Only three Oregon nesting records for harlequin ducks have been found in the literature. Jewett (1925 and 1931) reported a nest on Zig Zag River on the west slope of Mt. Hood, and a brood of downy young on the West Fork of the Wallowa River near Frazier Lake in the Wallowa National Forest. Gabrielson and Jewett (1940) also noted a brood on the Innaha River near where it is joined by Cliff River.

Soon after the dead female was found, two males and a female were observed flying over the pool at Camp Lucky Boy in the evening. The males were trying to outmaneuver one another for the favored position near the female. One can only conjecture, but it seems possible the extra male was the mate of the dead female.

Shortly after sunset, on May 8, male and female alighted in the Camp Lucky Boy pool. The birds were not very wary of people, for they swam to within approximately 50 feet of where several fishermen were casting and within 40 feet of where I was standing. The male followed the female most of the time. Both frequently dipped their bills and heads in the water and swam along for considerable distance with their eyes beneath the surface. Apparently, the lack of wariness towards humans is a common trait of harlequin ducks. Michael and Michael (1922), Jewett *et al.* (1953) and LaFave (1955) reported instances of close approach and Jewett (1931) wrote of a boy picking up and handling a nesting female.

Blue River is a mountain stream with cold, clear water and many stretches of fast water alternating with small, relatively calm pools. Near Camp Lucky Boy the trees have been logged and the river is bordered with brush and tree reproduction. The elevation is about 1,300 feet at the camp.

As nearly as can be determined, the western Oregon harlequin nest reported by Jewett (1931) was at an elevation of approximately 1,900 feet. LaFave (1955) found a brood at about 1,400 feet elevation on the West Branch of the Little Spokane River and considered this to be about the lowest nesting elevation reported for eastern Washington.

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