

# Birds Over Manhattan

By WILLIAM L. FINLEY AND  
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HOW could one expect to study bird life from a 21st-story window of a sky-scraper hotel in the center of New York city? Here among the upper reaches and roofs of lofty buildings are the snow-capped concrete peaks that are at times hidden in the clouds. Below at the base of every deep canyon is the continuous night and day roar—rumble of cars, busses and trolleys, the never-ending tooting of ambulance horns and shrieking of fire engines. How different from nature's wilderness formations of gigantic cliffs and rock towers that gradually crumble with old age and erosion—almost as far from the haunts of wild birds as Portland is from this great metropolis.

Off to the left is the tall shaft of the Empire State building that was boosted up over a thousand feet, not by nature, but by man. Within sight is the renowned Rockefeller Center where the narrow, window-dotted toothpick reaches so far into the sky that it seems in everlasting danger of being toppled over by the gales that sweep in from the sea. We gazed out at this greatest mechanized Grand Canyon of the world, and there was a duck hawk or falcon circling between the gigantic con-

crete towers. High above and speeding to the South an airplane seemed scarcely larger than the hawk because of distance and height.

Suddenly a dark shaft like an arrow shot downward with amazing speed and rush, straight down between the high walls, and like a thunderbolt struck a thoughtless winging pigeon. It was the merciless duck hawk picking up his supper so swiftly as to almost elude sight. Or perhaps it was just the love of the chase, for the slim, bold-eyed falcon is a real hunter of his feathered fellows. How unthought-of, how weird a scene of a wild duck hawk living in the greatest city in America, a hawk whose natural home is on the cliffs above the river in a wilderness area.

Look away down between the narrowing walls to the street below. Pigeons waddle along in the gutters picking up their regular meals or weaving in and out among the hurrying feet. They are a daily part of the life and program of this big city. The birds are at home and contented. The people are more contented because they are there—yes, the blue pigeons that are fed by old and young and furnish friendliness from the Statue of Liberty to St. Marks in Rome. How many thousands, perhaps millions, of pigeons have taken the city over, no one has ever attempted to estimate. They are there and that is enough. And that is why the duck hawk spends the winter in the city.

## Why the Hawk Lives in the City

Years ago one of the leading naturalists in New Jersey discovered the nest of a duck hawk high up on the Palisades of the Hudson river. Descending the steep wall on a rope to the aery, he found the striking records of 23 aluminum bands of carrier pigeons buried around the edges of the nest. It had long been a habit of owners of carrier pigeons to take the birds up to Albany and beyond and release them in competitive races back to New York city. This was a surprising record of the number of pigeons caught by the duck hawk along the fly-way of the river gorge. It may have been these flying contests that turned the old duck hawk into a pigeon hawk.

"I'll never let this discovery reach the public," said the naturalist, "because it would mean that all pigeon owners would make a business of exterminating the few remaining duck hawks along the Hudson."

This was 30 years ago. Times have changed now so the duck hawk's hunting grounds are in the midst of New York city, where common pigeons are so abundant. It is the easiest place for him to live. It is even safer, for along the rivers, lakes and marshes every sportsman has his finger on the trigger to nail a hawk that might get a duck.

"Let him live in the city," said the duck hunter. "The city is populated with pigeons. But there is no chance for wingshooting or hunting them

among the massed populace and where there are millions of windows to shatter in every direction." This finest American falcon (Falso peregrinus anatum) is truly a master of the air. Normally he lives and nests where cliffs furnish good aeries. His fare is composed almost entirely of birds, and he kills at will. No bird is safe from him. When he has tiny young in his inaccessible cliff dwelling, he brings in the smaller song birds to them. Both parent hawks are noisy during the breeding season, uttering piercing calls from the sky, tormenting all the other birds in the region. He sallies forth over lake or marsh for ducks and other game birds. He nests from Alaska and west of central Green-

land and as far south as California, ranging into the middle states from Kansas to Maryland. Four is the usual clutch of eggs, but there may be from three to five creamy yellow ones blotched with brown.

## 'Streamlined' Hawk Has Some Companions

He is a streamlined figure of darkish gray with black head, soft tawny breast streaked with black, large piercing black eyes, sharp talons. His cousin, the Peale's falcon, is a darker form that nests on the Aleutians and over to the Commander islands, and winters in Oregon, where he can be seen dashing into a flock of sandpipers or other shore birds.

The duck hawk is not the only wild bird that drops in from a wilderness area to take up headquarters around the roofs of a large eastern city. Just across the street canyon from our hotel are some penthouse homes on the lofty tops. Surrounding there are little green garden fences enclosing rows of dwarf evergreen trees and pots of little plants as if they were rooted in the concrete fields. Soot, smoke, smells float up from below, but no sweet mountain air. The whole picture is a synthetic makeshift for a home and garden, a substitute for a natural hillside. During the spring and autumn migrations, an occasional warbler or sparrow pauses in curiosity, but soon moves on.

Where a vast area like New York city is massed with huge structures, one would think that birds could not like in such a place. This is true in the case of most species, yet a few can adjust their lives to strange conditions.

Out in the open field or on a graveled island, the nighthawk usually lives. His food is insect life that flies about at night time. He picks up his supper on the wing. The female lays her two dark spotted eggs on the ground without the sign of a nest. Since a huge city attracts flies, mosquitoes and other insects, the night hawk likes to hover over it. Far above the masses of people and noisy traffic in the street are graveled roofs where the night hawk loves to nest and hatch her eggs. As the young birds grow to maturity they flutter over the high rail and take wing with their parents into the sky.

Another feathered fellow that can take to city life is the little swift that originally plastered its nest on the inside of a hollowed-out stump. As these, as well as forested areas, disappeared through the East the swift found many old chimneys that served the purpose of roosting and nesting places. This bird resembles a swallow, drops into a deserted chimney and builds a strange little basket nest. He brings in some tiny sticks and, with sticky saliva from his mouth, pastes these and fashions



# Mole Hills Out Of Mountains

By REUBEN L. JENSEN

MAKING mountains out of mole hills is no novelty but it remained for Helen and Mat Thompson of Monmouth, Or., to make mole hills out of mountains. Mr. Thompson, formerly a guide on Mount Rainier, and Mrs. Thompson are both ardent mountaineers and their mutual interest has led to the development of a unique hobby—making plaster models of Western mountain peaks.

It started in 1924 when they set out to make a relief map of the Mount St. Helens area that would be accurate enough for use on a trip in that region. Their first attempts were so successful that they decided to try their luck with other mountain areas. Over a period of years they tried and abandoned various scales and materials of construction until they finally developed and standardized their present methods. Now all maps are made to the same scale as the contour maps published by the United States geological survey. An area approximately 10 miles square is represented on a model five inches square.

All the first models had a rather flat appearance because they were seen from above while the normal viewpoint of a mountain is below the summit. To compensate for this changed viewpoint the vertical proportions were increased. Several ex-

periments showed that increasing the total height one fifth gave an entirely satisfactory result.

The original model from which the master mold is made is built up of cardboard layers each one sixteenth inches thick. These are cut along the 500-foot contour lines of the geological survey map. The steps between the 500-foot contours and all surface irregularities shown by the 100-foot contours of the map are then modeled in with dentists' old tools and a special modeling wax developed by the Thompsons. About 65 hours, on an average, are required to complete this stage of the work.

The base of the finished plaster cast represents sea level. The amount of plaster put into the mold is measured carefully to assure accuracy. Green, blue and white oil paints are used to color forests, lakes and snowfields. Blue ink is used to trace stream courses and trails are indicated in brown. A surprising amount of detail is included notwithstanding the limited size of the maps. And they have proved to be satisfactory for the original purpose of use of a guide in mountain-climbing.

them against the wall. Since a city has many old chimney pots sticking into the sky, this bird became known as the chimney swift, and with an abundance of flying insects it has found a successful and prosperous

living place in the midst of a city.

The Vaux swift of the Pacific Coast has not yet turned to chimney swift habits because the hollowed firs and pines are more abundant than city sites.

## Farmers Would Put Skunks in Their Own Place

"It is a serious mistake to classify skunks as fur-bearers and to give them protection as such," according to George Fruit, a Linn county farmer living adjacent to the foothills of the Cascade mountains. "It is unfair to the farmer and poultryman who is trying to produce turkeys, chickens and eggs. It is also inconsistent for the game commission to spend so many thousands of dollars in trying to provide more upland game birds and at the same time protect the worst enemy these game birds have in the Willamette valley."

According to Fruit these striped predators are equally fond of eggs, young birds and full-grown poultry. They will squeeze through holes and cracks in chicken houses or poultry fences so small it would not seem possible for a mouse to enter, and they operate 12 months in the year, not just during the winter when there is an open season on them. Fruit said:

"They are really a serious menace and their numbers seem to be increasing. If the game commission expects the co-operation of the farmers in its efforts to provide more and better shooting for the sportsmen of the state, then it should make more of an effort to co-operate with the farmers and poultrymen. Turkeys and hens slaughtered by skunks provide no dinners for

the people in the towns and cities and every bird so destroyed reduces the grower's profits by that much. It likewise reduces the buying power of the man on the farm and the entire state is thereby the loser. Many thousands of dollars worth of poultry is destroyed annually by the odoriferous pests in the Willamette valley alone. In my opinion the value of the domestic birds thus destroyed far outweighs the value of the skunk furs marketed. There is no way of estimating the number of game birds destroyed. This loss is greater because they do not have the protection of houses and fences.

"It would help like everything if the farm boys could be permitted to trap on their own and surrounding lands without paying a license. The loss in revenue to the game commission would be slight because the boys cannot and do not buy trapping licenses now. No one boy would catch very many but the total take would be enough to keep down the number of animals in the immediate vicinity of the farms to the point where they would no longer make poultry such a hazardous and doubtful enterprise.

"There may be sections of the state where skunks do little or no damage. Let them be protected and maintained as fur-bearers in those areas, but elsewhere the poultryman should be protected from their depredations."



Helen Thompson 'breaking' a mold. Empty mold in foreground, and a cast still hardening in mold.



Helen and Mat Thompson inspecting some of their 'model mountains.' —Photos by Reuben L. Jensen.