

# Interesting, But no Domestic Pet Is the Avocet

## 'Blue Stockings' Show Rare Bird Intelligence In Protecting Nests

By WILLIAM L. FINLEY AND ED F. AVERILL

FLYING, walking or swimming, the avocet is one of the most conspicuous of our waders or shore birds. It likewise appears to be one of the most intelligent.

It is not through desire to avoid the arduous labors of nest building that it constructs no elaborate home in which to deposit its eggs and incubate its young. Rather it is because the bird realizes that in the open plains country where it dwells, a nest of any considerable size would attract the attention of enemies looking for a chance to lunch on avocet eggs. The long-legged brightly colored bird therefore lines a slight depression in the salt grass marsh with a few weeds and deposits eggs so nearly the color of their surroundings as to be undistinguishable. Even when the mother bird is on the nest the ensemble blends so completely into the surrounding color scheme her presence remains unsuspected.

But it is not only in the selection of the nesting site the bird displays evidence of intelligence. Although the original nest may consist of only a few weeds and grasses, when flood waters threaten to inundate her home, the avocet sets to work and proceeds to raise the structure from one to six inches as the need arises. This is done by adding more weeds, grass and small sticks. By the time the water has receded the young are usually hatched and ready to follow their parents in the search for food.

This may be found on the dry land as the birds chase the low-flying insects, in the shallow waters where the mud is stirred up with the bills to bring its insect inhabitants to the surface or in the deeper water where swimming is required to reach the surface insect life.

It is when feeding in the shallower waters the birds provide the most interesting study. Swinging its long

up-turned bill from side to side much as the old-time reapers swung a scythe or sickle, the avocet stirs up the mud and water, until the latter is literally teeming with aquatic insects. How these are found, segregated and swallowed without at the same time taking in a large quantity of mud is another one of the many mysteries of nature.

Shallow alkaline lakes and ponds throughout the arid and semi-arid sections of Eastern Oregon are favorite haunts of these strikingly beautiful birds. Small flocks are often seen wading in water nearly up to their feathers, picking up insects congregated on the surface. When the water becomes too deep for wading they swim easily but usually not far from shore. In some instances they have been seen feeding in irrigated fields.

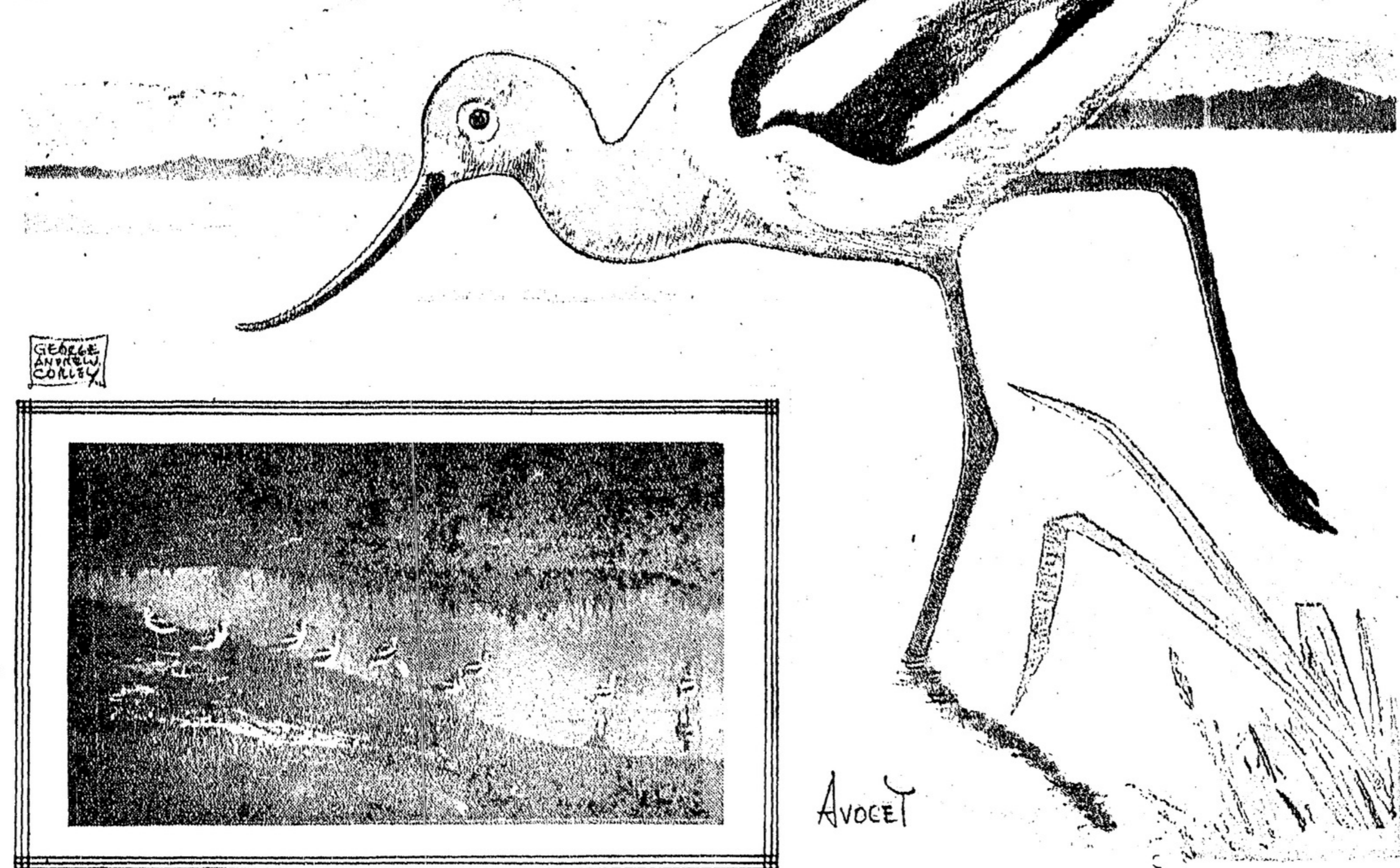
The avocet is not only conspicuous because of its size but also by reason of its brightly colored plumage. When grown it is 18 inches in length and its legs are as long in proportion as those of all the other waders. Its white body equipped with black and white striped wings make it conspicuous at great distances.

It was formerly much sought after by hunters as its flesh made a very acceptable dish when served on the table. Nearing extinction when the migratory bird treaty was first negotiated, it has been staged a comeback under the complete protection afforded it. Now, as stated, it is one of the common birds about the shores of most of our Eastern Oregon lakes. This is especially true in the recently restored Malheur bird reserve.

One of the names by which it was known by shooters was "blue shanks," or "blue stockings," the color of its long bare legs being responsible for this. Another name sometimes applied is that of "Irish snipe."

When one is in the vicinity of their nests the fact is made known by one or more birds setting up a great outcry. They will fly overhead and circle about in much the same manner as do the more common killdeers.

the ground at a safe distance or if water is near they will settle on it. Here the maneuvers of head-bobbing and wing-waving are most amusing. Sometimes the body will be all but submerged and with head laid out along the water the bird will swim away just as a wounded duck or goose will in its efforts to escape the pursuing hunter. The avocet hopes in this way to draw the unwelcome visitor away from the vicinity of the nest.



Avocets at ease on the shore of a lake.

IF THERE is a nesting colony in the vicinity, the screaming of the ones to first give the alarm will assemble others. Some will doubtless be nesting mates who have their nests at the first alarm since the nests and eggs are harder to find when not occupied. At times they will alight on

covered with a soft down and are able to run and follow the parents almost as soon as they are out of the eggs.

One of the reasons the eggs are so hard to see, even when one is looking directly into the nest, is because they are so thickly spotted. The general shade of the eggs is pale olive

or buff but the spots always exactly match the brownish colored grass lining of the depression.

The avocet is one of the truly western birds, being rarely seen east of the Mississippi river. It breeds as far north as Central Alberta and Southern Manitoba and winters from Southern California and Southern Texas to Southern Guatemala.

There are four species of avocets in the world but only one species in

any one country. One is found in North America, one in South America, a third in Europe and a fourth in Australia.

Each of these birds has a rudimentary hind toe and the front toes webbed, in which latter respect they differ from most other shore birds. In contrast to their long slender legs, neck and bill, the wings are rather short and their tails short and square. Their plumage is thick and duck-like.

# 'Oh Boy' Covers the Situation Adequately

## It's a Grand Thing to Live In Oregon

By MARSHALL N. DANA  
Sketches by Hank Suter

"OH BOY!" is the universal language of the high places.

When you come sprawling out upon a lofty lookout standing apart in a gargantuan jumble of mountain peaks and the view about you is a breath-taking alternation of towering summits and deep-washed canyons all bathed in the blood-red light of the sunset, you hunt about for a suitable expletive of appreciation and it is:

"Oh Boy!"

When you have fished all day on the rapid Collovash with scarcely a strike, then just on a chance and a hope move over to smaller Hot Springs Fork, and there bring to the basket with nearly every cast a lusty, hard-fighting rainbow trout, the indignation with which you address the divinity of all piscatorial triumphs and tall tales to come is:

"Oh Boy!"

When you explore the pack sack and find the juicy apple pie that Mother tucked away in its depths, all safely guarded by the disk-shaped former container of a motion picture film, and you pass big, flaky and delicious hunks around among the boys on top of beans, fried potatoes, bacon



and trout, they have a way of speaking their gratitude. It is:

"Oh Boy!"

When up among lonely trails you encounter never-resting Warden-Sergeant Everett Meads of the state police and, after checking the validity of your fishin' license, he tells you how he met a big, very big, bear and her cubs on the Granite Peaks trail, and how she rose up ten feet or so tall and doubled up her dukes in boxing posture while the cubs bet on

mama—and how he left from there so fast the air friction almost started a forest fire—he describes the vivid impression that strained moment left on his mind with:

"Oh Boy!"

When Forest Artist Hank Suter stow away half a week's rations after a 15-mile hike, leading that jaunty mule from Oak Grove station to Baggs by Hot Springs, sees him stretch out luxuriously in the huge cedar tub filled with hot mineral water and then blow up the rubber mattress of his sleeping bag with lung, bean and onion power, Hank respectfully ejaculates:

"Oh Boy!"

It's a great descriptive if you say it where the mountains are big, the canyons are deep, the streams are strong and the deer leap long.

So, when this writer, in company with Junior, Tom and Hank, set out when the days were longer, warmer and a bit more golden than now and found an outdoor principally altogether confined within the boundaries of eastern Clackamas county, he, too, sought a suitable acknowledgment and brought forth:

"Oh Boy!"

Now there may be claims for sights that thrill and glorify and these may come from Marion, Linn and Lane, which are other counties that deliver the Cascade mountain streams into the Willamette, but it is submitted that Clackamas in grand scenery and gorgeous fun is without a peer—at least in proximity to metropolitan Portland.

Perhaps you didn't know Mount Hood is in Clackamas county. And Timberline lodge.

And Oak Grove ranger station, that throbbing center of forest activity and fire fighting.

THAT'S a beginning point. It's where the automobile gives way to the pack mule and the saddle horse. It's where the new road up the ever-changing Clackamas river yields to the trails. It is where Charles (Tom to you) Brown with youth's enthusiasm and technical training succeeded veteran, forest-wise Al Armstrong as district ranger, and seems in a good way to inherit his popularity.

So, down the Oak Grove Fork a little way, up to where the main Clackamas and the Collovash flow together, on to Tom's Meadow. There, while the pack stock grazed, where a bear wooded at the flicker of a fire, came the night and the stars which are the arc lights on the streets of the skies.

And in the early morning that means 5 a. m. climbing up and up and away from all the rivers, yet coming now and then to spring or tiny lake, the source of rivers.

Until, on the rocky tip of a promontory set in a tumbling sea of mountains whose shores are washed by deep green forests, stood a roughly gathered yet staunch shack—Bull of the Woods lookout. And on the north was Hood, on the south Jefferson, still farther the Three Sisters, and yet to the west through a V-shaped slot, the soft, level blur of



the Willamette valley. As before stated:

"Oh Boy!"

Sheer underneath, more than a thousand feet straight down, the twinkles of Deep Slide lakes. A little way beyond a minor pass, and down through thickets of luxuriously laden huckleberry bushes, to West Welcome lake, and were the Eastern Brook trout hungry there!

And a camp high among the rocks, where the winds sang the mountains to sleep, where the sky was a showcase of glittering diamonds, where a prospector had dreamed of wealth only to leave behind an empty tunnel and a tailing of sterile rocks.



THE mountains are criss-crossed with trails so that forest blazes located by the lookout with the aid of Osburne fire finders can be reached as quickly as possible with emergency crews. It is heartening to watch the forest fire fighters in action, for they are protecting your property and mine—the national forest. Only when you follow such a trail as guides you through Pansy Basin and over Pansy mountain and thus to Bagby Hot Springs, utterly unspoiled by commercialism, on the upper reaches of the Hot Springs Fork, do you realize how great a personal asset the national forest is, not in trees and protected watersheds only, but in the accretions of the heart.

Perhaps, some day, there will be a spa at the hot springs, because the water is potable, it fills the big cedar bathtubs delightfully, it furnishes continuous and never-failing hot dish water and it makes the best coffee in the world. But thus "developed" it could never again be as delightful as now.

It would be easy to linger in the unspoiled solitude of Bagby Hot Springs through enthralled and sunny days, to take the baths, to drink the water, to love the loveliness of it all, to fish the Na Horn, the Hot Springs fork and other streams—to stay on and on beyond press time.

But there had been some 60 miles of hiking by the time we moved on to Alder Swamp cabin for a night and had gone on in to the ranger station. Yet, when on the map a curved line marked the way and the country covered, it was but a little of the whole.

For Clackamas county in the Cascade mountains is an outdoors principality without peer near Portland.

Oh Boy!