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No. 7



NUMBER 1

Exposure
1/25 second, f.5.6

AN ADVENTURE WITH A FEATHERED SUBMARINE

BY HOWARD TAYLOR MIDDLETON

Illustrated with Graflex Pictures by the Author

IT was a bleak, hazy day in winter with a hint of snow in the air. The Rancocas was incased in ice and the bordering marshes gleamed white with frost.

Standing at the top of an embankment, scanning the meadow below us through our glasses for signs of wild life, Pal and I discovered a tiny something that stood out from its surroundings with a pronounced silvery sheen.



others being the Horned Grebe, of about the same size as our new-found friend, but with tufts of feathers projecting from each side of the head like a hood, and Holboell's Grebe, which is much larger, and very rare. The dabchick is about thirteen inches in length, and at a distance strongly resembles a duck with a chick-en's bill. In fact, he is popularly known along New Jersey inland streams as the Hen-billed Duck.

He dresses immaculately, in a jacket of dusky grayish brown over a vest of silken white. His throat is adorned with a stylish black stock, worn hind side before, while a skull cap of the same sombre hue, pulled well down over the eyes, covers his shapely head.

NUMBER 2

Exposure 1/25, second, f.5.6

While we gazed it moved forward slightly with an odd jerky motion, both slow and clumsy. We were too far away to identify the object, but we knew it to be alive, and that fact, of course, aroused our curiosity to the point where a closer inspection became imperative.

Making a cautious approach, we were soon near enough to recognize our quarry as Mr. Dabchick, also known as the Pied-billed Grebe, and the Water Witch. This bird is the most common of the three grebes which visit the Rancocas, the

This chance meeting was, for us, good luck, indeed. Many times during the autumnal days, while drifting about the Rancocas in our canoe, we had endeavored to approach to within camera range of this feathered submarine, but without success. Every time before the canoe got close enough for a fair sized image to be visible in the Graflex mirror, the champion diver of all birdland disappeared only to bob up again serenely a hundred yards down stream.

As an example of the grebe's ability to sink from sight with great dispatch, let me say that it is next

to impossible to bag him with a gun if he happens to be looking your way when you shoot. He can actually "go under" between the explosion of the fire-arm and the arrival of the shot.

Get Mr. Dabchick away from his native environment, however, as in the present instance, and he is at the mercy of the camera man. He is not built for land travel, his feet being a pair of three-bladed paddles, shaped like the leaves of the horse-chestnut tree, attached at the extreme rear of the body. This makes walking, or even waddling, a very difficult matter. While he can fly, after a fashion, when once in the air, he is only able to "take off" successfully when rising out of the water after gaining momentum from fast swimming and wing beating. Some ornithologists claim that the grebe migrates in a "blow," taking advantage of the high winds to aid his flight. His land gait is a lurching ahead, with breast to the earth, propelled by the paddles from behind.

Frozen out of the Rancocas, the bird was en route to a nearby marshy pool which a bubbling spring kept open even in the coldest weather. Here he could remain in cozy comfort until warmer days should come. Although his favorite food of frogs and lizards was not available at this season, seeds of grasses would furnish him with sustenance.



NUMBER 3

Exposure 1/40 second, f.5.6

On arriving within easy camera range I prepared for the first picture. As the sky was overcast, and, realizing that our subject would, in all probability, remain passive for portraiture, I set the big *f.4.5* lens in our 4 x 5 R. B. Graflex at *f.5.6*, and the shutter at $1/25$ second, thus being assured of ample exposure even under adverse light conditions.

At my word of "Ready!" Pal moved forward, and, kneeling in front of Mr. Dabchick, stretched out a gloved finger. The bird held his ground valiantly, but showed his displeasure at our presence by angry lunges with a stubby beak.



NUMBER 4

Exposure
 $\frac{1}{40}$ second, *f.5.6*

Then Pal moved away just far enough to allay the anger, but not the curiosity of our subject, and it was under these interesting circumstances that portrait No. 1 was procured. The pose depicts Mr. Dabchick exactly as we found him on our first approach. He is in a characteristic resting position with head up and inquisitive eyes full upon the photographers.

"I wish he would show us his paddles," yearned Pal. "Do you think he will sit erect with a little urging?"

"Try him and see," I suggested, preparing the while for another picture.

With her little hand beneath his silvery breast, Pal very slowly and gently pushed him backward until he seemed in imminent danger of turning a somersault, but at the last instant he recovered his equi-

librium by sturdy wing flapping and spreading of feet. In this ludicrous position, he was literally sitting on his tail, or on the very few curly feathers which do service in that capacity, with webbed feet stretched out in front. It was thus that picture No. 2 was recorded.

While we were debating as to what sort of portrait to try for next, Mr. Dabchick solved the problem for us by lumbering ahead the few intervening feet to the brink of the pool, and glided happily in—back in his element once again. No small boy at the spring re-opening of the old swimming hole was ever more wildly elated than was Dabchick now. He proved his ecstasy by innumerable swift and graceful evolutions, sending the spray a-flying merrily in dives and rushes—now, submerging—now, rising high upon the

NUMBER 5



Exposure
 $\frac{1}{40}$ second, f.5.6

NUMBER 6



Exposure
 $\frac{1}{110}$ second, f.4.5

surface, and, finally, with the combined aid of feet and wings, running on the water.

As the pool was shaded by bordering willows, it was not practicable, under the prevailing light conditions, to try for action pictures. That being the case, we were forced to wait until, his enthusiasm abated, Mr. Dabchick floated tranquilly about in his miniature lake.

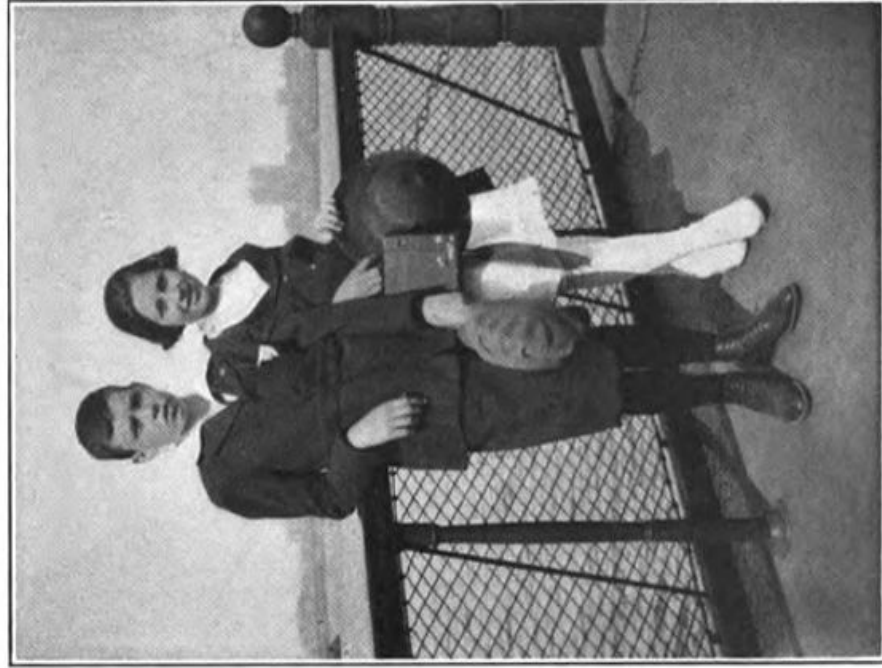
By this time the haze had lifted somewhat, and while the sun was not bright by any means, we felt justified in increasing the shutter speed to $\frac{1}{40}$ second. When our subject struck a pose that pleased us, and his reflected image ap-

peared in the dark root-stained water, we made our third exposure, picture No. 3.

To get variety in our series of portraits we determined to include in at least one record, the ripples, which always lend enchantment to any aquatic wild life portrait. Patience brought us eventually the effect we wished, which is shown in No. 4.

The light was gradually growing better, and as we were preparing to take No. 5, a shaft of subdued sunlight fell directly upon the floating image of Mr. Dabchick, bathing him in mellow light. Taking advantage of this smile from the skies, I tripped the Graflex shutter.

A rigid test of the ability of the Graflex to produce worth-while action pictures in the shade came when Mr. Dabchick, apparently tired of swimming, pushed an awkward way up the bank of the pool, and, resting in the shadow of a willow, began preening his feathers with his beak. As he did this with quick movements of his head and neck, it was folly to expect to portray the scene without getting a blurred image, at a slower shutter speed than $\frac{1}{110}$ second. Therefore, the lens was opened wide ($f.4.5$), and the final exposure made. It was with grave doubt as to the outcome that No. 6 was taken, but the negative, made on *Super Speed* Kodak Cut Film, proved that doubt unwarranted.



WHEN THE SHUTTER CLICKED

Made with a No. 2 Brownie, by Otto Hirschberg

NUMBER 5



Exposure
 $\frac{1}{40}$ second, f.5.6

NUMBER 6



Exposure
 $\frac{1}{110}$ second, f.4.5