

BACK IN TIME

Look, up in the sky. It's loons, lots of them!

By DICK SHEARER

Many long-time North Wales residents are familiar with the story about the loons that descended on the Florex greenhouses just outside of town on Thanksgiving Day, 1938.

No doubt it was a tragic experience for the birds and a costly misfortune for the Florex folks, but the writer of the following story that appeared in the Nov. 25, 1938, *Reporter*, obviously struggled to keep his tongue and cheek separated.

We bring you, "Wild Loons, Driven Off Course By Storm, Land in Florex Lake":

A flock of scores of feathered Corrigans, more than 500 miles from their native habitat, created a stir by landing in the North Penn Valley yesterday.

They were wild loons, sky high fliers the size of turkeys and resembling wild geese of these latitudes. At North Wales where part of the flock came to grief, many people thought they were getting Thanksgiving dinners straight from the sky. A second part of the flock landed in a creek west of Kulpsville.

So far as can be determined this morning, the flock was divided into three parts, probably driven by the high winds that accompanied the Thanksgiving Day storm. The storm swept down from the Saranac region and might easily have carried even as strong birds as loons in its path.

Many people believed that the flocks were wild geese when they saw them flying overhead and even when they landed no one except the game protectors knew why such a group of "whoppers" managed to get together.

The birds put in their appearance about noon time and created comparatively little disturbance at Kulpsville except for their weird cries. The wailing scream, sounding like insane laughter, is sometimes said to be the source of the slang "loon" or "loony."

At North Wales, the cries were the prelude to a tragedy for the strange visitors. The first flock, about a hundred in number, landed on a pond near the Florex Gardens off Beaver Street.

A second flock, still high in the air, saw the landing place and circled down like a squadron of airplanes, picking out a landing spot.

This group, however, mistook the glass of the

greenhouse for part of the pond, and dived for it.

About 15 or 20 of them struck the roof before they could shear off. Holes were punched in the glass and a few of the birds may have been killed. A dozen or more rolled off helpless to the ground.

Residents of that corner of North Wales, attracted by the cries, were watching the flock and when this occurred dashed out to get their shares of the potential Thanksgiving dinner. One boy made two trips of it and brought three home.

One man, who picked out a bird not used to being handled, sustained a deep gash on the hand from a loon's bill. The loon is perfectly capable of making himself unpleasant with his bill, it being used as a spear with which to catch fish.



THESE WERE the lucky loons. They managed to land safely on the pond at Florex Gardens. Those less fortunate crashed into the greenhouses and died.

Game protectors rushed to North Wales to take care of the situation. Russell Sturzebecker of Lansdale, identified the birds as loons and pointed out that although Eskimos may regard them as a delicacy, they are not the kind of food that is relished by people in these latitudes.

The game protectors also made a tour of the homes to which loons had been taken and collected them. Householders were told that the fowls were not only poor eating, but that possession of one is a federal offense on which there is a \$100 fine.

It may be some time before the injured birds can fly away, as the loon is so large and heavy that it is slow to take to the air (even) when it is in good condition.

There you have it, just another quiet Thanksgiving in the North Penn area. It reminds us of "The Great Turkey Drop" episode of the TV sitcom "WKRP in Cincinnati." Les Nessman, where are you?