

Natural weld in a Mallard and a Pink-footed Goose

THE accompanying photograph (p. 188) shows the right and left humeral bones of a female Mallard *Anas p. platyrhynchos* shot in December, 1959.

The right humerus is a remarkable example of a natural weld, where the fractured bone has been re-united by the formation of a callus. The bird was shot as it flew up from a bed of rushes at Whire Moss near Kirkby-in-Furness, nine miles north of Barrow, Lancashire. The original injury had apparently been caused by a BB shot which was later found under the skin close to the bone. The bird at the time of death was in good condition and could obviously fly.

There had undoubtedly been a complete fracture of the humerus and the callus uniting the two bone segments had formed at the end of one piece and on the lower surface of the other. This left one end free and protruding, with a resultant shortening of the bone by 1.6 cm. The formation of a permanent callus anchoring the broken pieces would have taken some time and during this period the bird would have been particularly susceptible to predation. There must have been a time when the bird was flightless and even with the comparatively quick formation of a provisional callus it is highly desirable that the muscles over the fracture site are rested as much as possible. It is in fact amazing that this bird survived at all.

I am most grateful to Mr. Frank Taylor for sending me this bird and for details of his shot.

The lower photograph on p. 188 is of a rather similar healed fracture in the tarso-metatarsus of a Pink-footed Goose *Anser brachyrhynchus* shot in the winter of 1953-54. The leg was later sent to Slimbridge in the condition shown. The successful welding of this fracture is less remarkable than that of the Mallard humerus since geese are comparatively well able to look after themselves with one leg out of action.

P. J. S. Olney.

Mute Swans feeding on fallen *Prunus* blossom

It is a custom for very large quantities of gathered *Prunus* blossom at the Parade Gardens, Bath, in spring, to be put into the River Avon at Pulteney Weir. The light material floating on the surface of the water is eagerly swallowed by the twenty to thirty non-breeding Mute Swans (*Cygnus olor*) which live there. With a thrustful and forward sieving movement of their bills the food is consumed with extreme rapidity. Equally large amounts of grass cuttings are more frequently and similarly distributed on the Avon but the swans take this much more at leisure.

Bernard King.