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# The President's Message

Doug Gilroy

AS this is read in print a great percentage of the birds that entertained us during the summer months with their song, beauty and charm, are now basking in the warm sunshine of the southlands. The wild flowers that brightened our prairie trails and woodlands have long since withered and died.



My thoughts go back to the little Western Chipmunks—of the good times we had watching their antics, and the fun of obtaining their portraits on color film. They, like the other species of ground squirrels, are curled up sound asleep in their snug burrows beneath the ground.

The “walking pin-cushion” or old man porcupine, instead of dining on fresh green stems of succulent plants is now obliged to exist on a monotonous diet of tree bark. He can't be bothered to go to sleep, so stays awake all winter.

Last, but not least, the third annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society has come and gone. As of last year it was quite successful. Our magazine, the BLUE JAY, has made great strides during the past two years, and this coming year we plan to make it even bigger and better. Our goal is to make it the leading nature magazine of Canada. However, we do need your help. Your president and executive urge all members to take the BLUE JAY a little more seriously. You do not need a written invitation to send in your stories and observations. You cannot help but see—if you are truly interested in the great outdoors—many interesting things that are well worthy of being printed in the BLUE JAY.



Then there is the problem of arrears. Some members have become a little slack and are behind in their dues. A membership committee has been formed and is striving hard for ways and means of increasing the circulation of our magazine.

We urge our Directors, who are scattered throughout the province to become even more active and create greater BLUE JAY interest in their districts.

As our Editor has pleaded so many times in the past—if each member would just try to get one more member, our problem would be solved.

Although we have a long winter and another summer ahead of us, time slips so fast that the fourth annual meeting will be upon us before we realize it. Your executive urges that all who are connected with the BLUE JAY, directors, members and future members, please strain a point to attend, and voice your ideas, praises and grievance.

Your president and officers take this opportunity to wish all who read this magazine a very Merry Xmas—and may your lives be made richer by all the wondrous and exciting things that Nature has in store for 1952.

## THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

**D**OU GILROY, who lives on R.R. 2, north of Regina, was the unanimous choice for president at the third annual meeting of the Society which was held in the auditorium of the Provincial museum of Natural History, October 26. Readers of the BLUE JAY are already acquainted with Mr. Gilroy, and know him as an ardent naturalist and photographer. His illustrated lectures which are now so frequently given in Regina and the surrounding area are being received with enthusiasm and have added his name permanently to the growing list of Saskatchewan's outstanding nature enthusiasts.



*Retiring President  
Cliff Shaw*

For years, the retiring president, Cliff Shaw has been a tower of strength not only to this Society, but as President of the Yorkton Natural History Society. Not only is he a nature photographer and writer but has a wide knowledge of the insect life, the flowers and the birds of this province. As immediate past president his advice and help will be constantly sought for and willingly given.

The other new officers elected are shown on the back cover of this issue.



*President  
Doug Gilroy*

Due to the late harvest and bad roads many delegates were unable to attend.

Dr. Stuart Houston, Yorkton, who is becoming a widely known naturalist, in his address, discussed in most illuminating fashion, with his own slides and bird traps, "Waterfowl Conservation and Eird Banding." One pertinent observation: "Never shoot a hawk you can get close enough to shoot at."

Mr. A. J. Hudson, in his archaeology address posed many questions re the first appearance of man here and described some of the thrilling finds while digging in Byzant Creek, near his farm at Mortlach.

Mr. Lloyd Peterson, Indian Head Entomologist, with help of slides described the insects that afflict the prairie Box Elder, American Elm and Green Ash.

Mr. D. R. Robinson, from the University Extension Service, urged growing of fruit-bearing trees for food, and evergreens for shelter and for beauty.

Members were encouraged by Mr. Carmichael's financial and membership report (844 members). They complimented him, too, on the well balanced issues of scientific and amateur nature observations.

Fred G. Bard, Lloyd Carmichael and Fred Robinson entertained with interesting slides and commentaries.

Resolutions passed dealt with the Annual Bird Count, a Saturday annual meeting for next year and appreciation of the provincial museum and work done by its director, Fred Bard.

## Life IS For Living

Elizabeth Cruickshank

**T**IME we spend out of doors provides delight for the hours when dull routine tasks must be done.

We can re-live at will the joyous experience of finding dozens of young robins—when we thought they had all gone south—devouring the dried crab apples on a neighbor's tree.

Or the thrill on a wet cold day when the prairie was truly just "a lovely place against the sky" and suddenly a brightness was all about—Myrtle Warblers were in the road, the ditches, the trees; yellow rumps always evident as they flew hither and thither oblivious to the weather.

Or the interesting day of contrasts in late autumn, tracking the 'bird of happiness'. Following one bluebird into a valley ravine—hoping to discover a flock—we found a clump of purple violets, odd old tree stumps, a basketful of mushrooms, beautiful shelf fungi, chickadees everywhere and in the clearing, a company of longspurs rising and falling in waves, as if in fun, on a bed of Silverwood, now a glowing carmen carpet.

We love to remember, too, the last Sunday in October when we found so many misplaced signs of spring; Moss Phlox in flower, clumps of Crocuses in inch-high fur coats, fresh green rosettes of Androsace, Early Loco Weed, one Blue Bell, Chickweed, Bladder-pod and Pussy Willow. How symbolic of Autumn, which someone has described as not so much a season of itself as a remembrance of all seasons!

Nor can we ever forget the day in early fall when unexpectedly the "soft and silent snow-white petals from the flowers that grow in the cold atmosphere" covered the ground, and Judy and I went to see Mr. Tom Mack's Museum at Lumsden. In the workshop, where his hand-made bee-hives were formerly fashioned with skill and pleasure, Mr. Mack has collected and preserved old Indian antifacts, spear and arrowheads, stones and minerals found in the Valley.

Articles from near and far are arranged so that they may be handled easily. A large shallow loyalist maple ladle, hook-shaped handle,

caught the eye. Was it used to skim the boiling syrup in the out-door kettles? Near it were old candle dips, ancient wrought iron sconces and candle snuffers. Tiny Lancashire clogs reminded us of the child labour of Dicken's day. We examined bits of dinosaur skeleton, of lava, of Hadrian's wall; a starfish, a cocoanut-like case of brazil nuts, intricate ingenious predecessors of the jig-saw puzzle (one closed—a little block—open a set of doll's furniture). Of all the things—too numerous to mention—of crowning interest were matching pieces of Diamond Willow, found near the river bank, which are to become a candelabra. With an artist's eye for beauty and colour Mr. Mack has chosen them, removed the bark revealing markings flowing like warm liquid honey, catching the light in their dull gold and amber sheen. A finished single candle stick on a base from the grooved trunk, and simply waxed, is a real collector's treasure item.

As we came down the hill, passing a bed of Johnny-jump-ups, their gay little faces only above the snow, we stopped to admire the view with Mrs. Mack from her window. Nestled on a shelf on the hillside, they are high enough to view the wide prairie skies above the far side of the Valley that was alive with burgundy, chartreuse and copper in shouting contrast to the soft white snow.

What privilege is theirs to be able to lift up their eyes unto the hills and to welcome the morning as it descends to the valley each new day.

A lone Pine Grosbeak was enjoying russet-red haws — two Red-breasted Nuthatches flitted upside down on the tree tips as we came into Judy's yard. We had enjoyed our too short visit with the Macks, for to this contented couple—in Graysonian manner, *life was for living.*

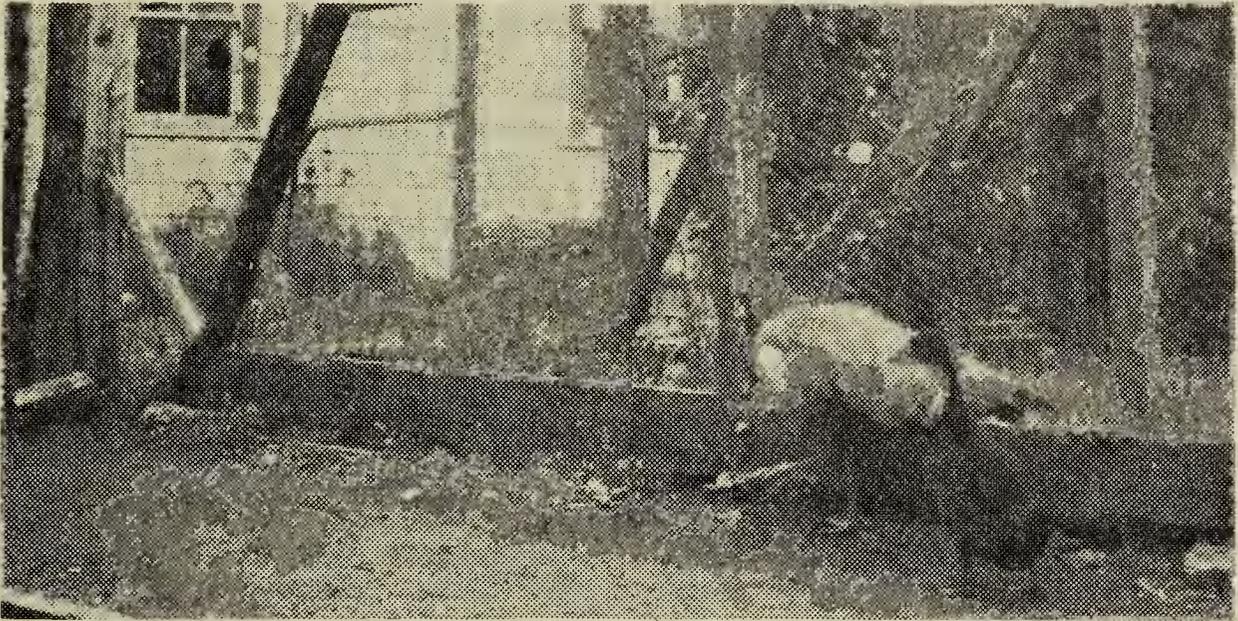
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*"Birds are Nature's most eloquent expression of Beauty, Joy and Freedom."*

—Dr. Frank M. Chapman.

## The Peahen's Duckling

Judge L. T. McKim



The above snap shot was taken at Inglewood Bird Sanctuary, Calgary, in August this year. A peahen lost her eggs and usurped the nest of a duck and raised one young one. The duckling is a cross between a tame black duck and a mallard.

Many thousands of wild geese and ducks spend the winter in the sanctuary and are fed by various companies. A spring keeps a considerable body of water open all winter.

## Our Whistling Swan

C. Stuart Francis, Torch River

**L**AST WEDNESDAY, November 7, I had the very great thrill of obtaining a Whistling Swan to add to my flock of Canada Geese, Snow Geese, etc., through rather unusual circumstances.

A farmer north of the village of Garrick was driving along the main road, when he suddenly saw a Swan sitting right in the middle of the road. He, of course, expected it to take wing as he drew closer to it, but at the last moment was forced to step on the brakes to avoid running over it. It did not move so he picked it up and put it into his truck cab and took it home, fearing that foxes or coyotes would soon kill it, or that it would perish in the sub-zero temperatures. After keeping it a week or so, he decided he had no proper place for it, or no other waterfowl to keep it company. He offered it to us and of course we were only too pleased to accept.

The bird was in rather bad shape, very thin and weak and blind in one eye. We put it in with our Wild Geese, and the discovery by the

Swan that it was with former acquaintances seemed to brighten him up. We are giving him lots of water, gravel, oat-sheaves, and mixed wheat, barley and oat chop. He seems to be getting stronger every day and is so tame already that he goes in and out of the Wild Goose house at will.

If this whistling Swan lives and thrives we will, in our family, always be grateful to the kind and thoughtful farmer who gave him to us, as too few persons would have taken the trouble to try to save the life of such a magnificent species of our native wildlife.

## Richardson Owl

Madeline Runyan, Punnichy

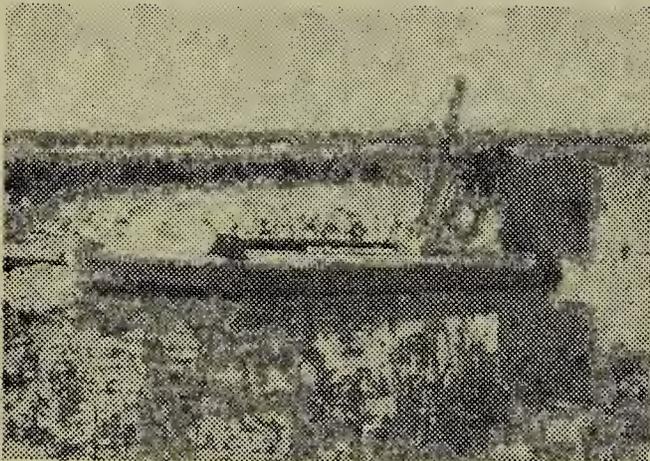
**F**OR three months last winter our hay loft was occupied by a tiny owl. We often saw him with a mouse, so he was a welcome visitor. One day, at noon, as he sat blinking in the sun, I approached to within three feet and took a very good snap with a portrait attachment. After looking at the owls in the Provincial museum we were able to identify this little one as a Richardson Owl.

## DUCK BANDING

*Len Dreger*

**T**HIS SUMMER the Museum assisted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife duck-banding crew. I thought it would be interesting to readers to know how this banding is done.

The season for this type of banding is during the last two weeks of July and the first two of August. At this time, when the ducks are losing their primaries, they are flightless. Different species vary as to the time of eclipse plumage and consequently there are always a few ducks on the wing. During this critical period ducks stay in the larger bodies of water where there is plenty of cover. At this stage, as their only effective means of protection, they become experts in hiding and diving.



—Photo by Dreger.

We made one drive on Eyebrow Lake and another on Chaplin Creek, which leads into Lake Johnson, near Coderre. The drive on Chaplin Creek resulted in trapping over 200 birds. On some successful drives on the larger lakes fifteen hundred or more birds are captured at one time.

A crew of about seven men are employed. A camp is established in the area to be worked. An airboat is used. It is a large flat boat, driven by a propeller and an airplane motor and is quite capable of travelling in very shallow water and able to pass through the heavy stands of marsh reeds.

An area where the ducks are plentiful, and where there is a fair amount of cover is selected. Wire netting about three feet high and

several hundred yards long is strung out into the lake at right angles to the shore. Aluminum rods are forced into the muddy bottom to hold the netting above the water, the bottom of the wire being a few inches below the surface. The purpose of this lead is to drive the ducks to this and then along it to the shore and into the trap. The trap is a circular pen, made similarly of netting, about fifteen feet in diameter, with a narrow entrance of about five inches. Another lead runs parallel to the shore and to the trap. These two leads form a V into which the birds are driven until they reach the trap. The entrance being narrow, they do not find their way out.

After the leads and traps have been set up, preparations are made for the drive. Three men approach in the airboat, from one to two miles back from the net, while other men walk along the shore and join them. These men are dropped off, armpit or waste-deep in the water, and spread out across the area. Rubber boots and heavy waders are seldom worn—an old pair of trousers and running shoes are more suitable and less tiring. Each man carries a noise maker to scare the ducks ahead of him, and a rod with a flag to hold above the reeds so the man in the airboat can tell where they are. The airboat works back and forth behind the men, making a great deal of noise and frightening the ducks towards the trap. As the lead is neared, on or two men are placed near the end, out in the water, to prevent any birds from passing by the end. The drive takes from two to four hours, so by the time the last birds are forced into the trap the men are glad to get out of the water.

When all the birds are in the pen the entrance is closed and the men assume their positions. One man keeps the records, one opens bands and hands them to the two or three banders. Another catches the ducks and, calling out the species name, age and sex, hands them to the banders. As the birds are banded they are released to carry on their normal life.

## The Singing Sparrow

Mrs. Fred Bilsbury, Grenfell

NOW are all you young folks ready to hear another little story of another of our pets? First, I must tell you that our lovely big Peter is still with us. We have seen him many times among the cattle, of all places! He still seems to have a strong memory of having been raised around the farm. He never runs far. When called he sits quite still.

So now I will tell you about the House Sparrow who could sing. One day about four years ago I was working in the garden quite close to the house. I saw an old mother cat come around the corner with something in its mouth. The "something" was kicking and fluttering so I at once came to see what she had. I told her to put it down, which she did. I picked up a baby sparrow, almost feathered, with a part of one wing missing. The cat had not injured it in any way, so I put it in a little box and fed it bread and milk with a pair of tweezers.

We named him "Dickie". Later we made a wooden cage for him and hung it in a south window. We taught Dickie to feed himself from an egg cup, in which we put cracked oats. The children, of course, played with him and he learned many things. His wing never grew the needed part to enable him to fly—when he did try to take off, he fell flat.

I never knew a more clever bird. He knew in a minute if a member of the family was in a hurry. He became excited and tried to fly after them as they hurried into another room. So we usually scooped him up and put him in a tin of chop in the kitchen window. He loved a saucer of water for a bath. One day he fell into a pail of warm wash water. What a sight!

Here are some funny things Dickie learned. One of the children would put him on their dad's shoulder; then the other would pretend to slap Dad. Dickie at once would stand up, and with wings down and wide-open beak would fight off the offender. Then he would snuggle close to Dad's neck. This they would do several times, only to be driven away by Dickie.

One evening I heard him twittering, so I said, "Sing Dickie" and turned the radio low. Again I repeated "Sing Dickie." Well he tried and tried and in not many days he could sing as well as any canary. He never sang unless told to, but would twitter in the usual sparrow manner. Aletha sometimes pretended to cry and Dickie would be nearly frantic. He would hop along the table in front of her, array his wings, then snuggle against her face. At times he would even peck her fingers furiously. When she stopped he took no further notice of her.

Now we often think of Dickie and his many funny ways. But best of all was his singing.

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## The Hummingbird Returns

Madeline B. Runyan

MY little female Hummingbird delighted us all summer with her visits to the honey bottle. As the bottle required to be refilled so often, I changed her over to an egg cup which pleased her fancy very well. She soon preferred to roost on the edge while she sipped the honey with her wings folded.

Two very jittery young Hummers accompanied her to the garden, late in July. They had gorgeous green backs, and made my original quite "mousey." I called them her green girls, assuming that they had been her nestlings.

On August 31 she was at the window after lamplight, and again next morning. By noon of September 1 she was away on her long migration, leaving four days earlier than last year. The "jitter-bugs" with the iridescent backs lingered until September 7.

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*I am sure we all miss not hearing from Maurice Street of Nipawin, K. Baines of Tisdale, Ed Wiley of Saltcoats and also Frank Baines of Saltcoats—let's hear from you again soon.*

—C. Stuart Francis.

# Canada Goose Sanctuary Project

Fred G. Bard



—Photo by Bard.

**T**HE REGINA BRANCH of the Fish and Game League and the Game Branch, Dept. of Natural Resources are working together to re-establish the Canada Goose on Last Mountain Lake. This project is under the supervision of Ralph "Hiawatha" Steuck, of Abernethy. Ralph is keenly interested in the future status of the Canada Goose. For several years he has raised these birds successfully on his "Kerry Farm" in Abernethy.

Through the co-operation of sportsmen, money has been collected to fence a five acre pen on an arm of Last Mountain Lake. Eggs, from

established preserves, were placed under sitting hens. In due course young goslings arrived, accompanied by the faithful mother hen. The families were taken to the farm of Arthur Perry, of Govan, who generously cared for the young birds. It meant considerable work to feed, protect and gather these thirty odd birds each night.

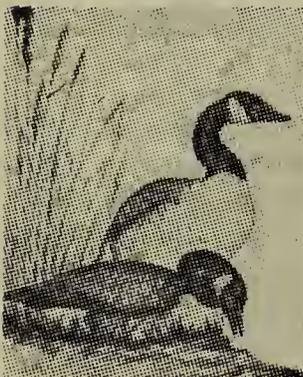
When Mr. E. L. Paynter, the Game Commissicner, Ralph Steuck and I visited the pens in August, the birds were in fine condition and growing rapidly—a real tribute to their keeper.

The Game Branch has acquired land inside the Bird Sanctuary at the north end of Last Mountain Lake. This area was seeded down to wheat and produced a fine crop. During the congregating of the ducks, this fall, this field was alive with birds.

It is difficult to effectively assist waterfowl in an area without causing damage to farmers' crops in the vicinity. The Game Branch has succeeded in improving this waterfowl resting area and to some extent assisted in controlling the feeding ducks from damaging the crops.

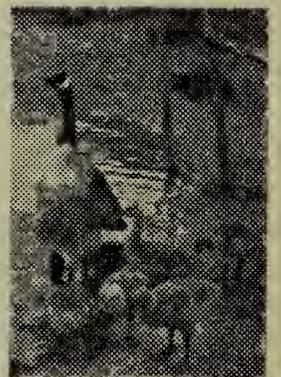
## Maggie and Jiggs, the Photographer

Buck Stueck, Abernethy



**A**T the present time there are ten Canada Geese, seven English Call Ducks, three wild Mallards and a pair of good looking Muskrats staying at my little sanctuary.

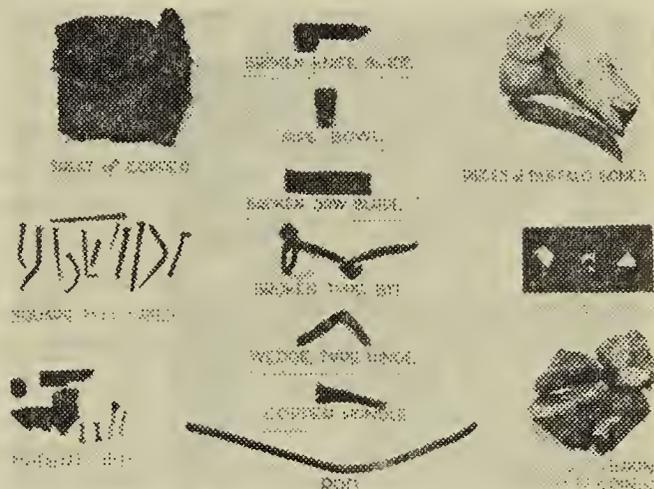
It is interesting to watch them as they all mingle together at different times of the day. Occasionally a muskrat gets his tail pinched by Jiggs, the gander who is all-over manager of the pond, Maggie stands by and generally approves of his bossy behavior.



As the cold winds of winter began to freeze over the pond and leave but one hole in the ice for all parties to swim in, it was quite noticeable that old arguments were over and even the two muskrats enjoyed the last open spot. They would sit on the edge of the ice and eat grain while the ducks and geese swam about.

One day I decided to set the movie camera up on a tripod to get a picture of the two muskrats. After everything was in order, and a long string from the camera to the house window was installed, I went in to have dinner. Immediately after dinner I went to the window to see if the muskrats were feeding in the proper position so that I could pull the string and get their pictures. To my surprise, Jiggs the goose was holding the string and jerking away. The camera was run down and he had already taken the picture.

## Old Fort Site Found



“SASKATCHEWAN prairie-land has given up a secret it held for more than a hundred years—the site of the original Fort Qu’Appelle, one of the most famous early trading posts in western Canada.

And the secret was given up to a device invented during the last war to save lives—a mine detector. The men with the mine detector did not actually discover the site of the old fort but they did prove the area involved was the correct one.

The man chiefly responsible for finding the site was Thomas Petty, Indian Head public school principal. After ten years of searching, Mr. Petty found what he believed was the site of the fort—the mine detector did the rest”—Regina Leader-Post.

Following is an account of some of the actual work done in the vicinity, written by Len Dreger, assistant at the provincial museum:

On November 6, two D.N.R. men from the Surveys Branch, Mac McConnel of the Bureau of Publications, and the writer visited this site, in the hopes of proving that this was the old fort. The main area where the old fort was thought to have stood was about 100 yards west of the highest level of land which was in the form of a ridge. A depression on the side of a small hill was described to us as the likely site of a side-hill barn.

A mine detector, on loan from the army, and operated by Mr. Bere-skin of the Surveys Branch readily located pieces of metal below the surface. By using it near the pits several places were found where the detector reacted to metal in the earth.

Material was recovered in the first

excavation at a depth of from twelve to fourteen inches, the hole being about eighteen inches square. Charcoal, pieces of fire clay, a buffalo rib bone about five inches long, a small bird, two toe bones which may have been from a coyote or dog, were retrieved. The metal, which started our search at this particular spot proved to be that of an old saw blade.

Other items found were as follows: the bowl of an old pipe; a rusted broken-type horse bit; a wedge type door hinge; an iron rod about thirteen inches long and a number of square hand-made nails. Near the depression which appeared to be the side-hill barn the mine detector lead us to a sheet of copper about eight inches square. About a hundred yards east of here, on the top of the highest knoll, we found a broken knife blade.

In one area the detector set up its loud whining sound every few feet, so we knew that there were a number of metal objects there. After digging we turned up about six square-cut nails, varying in size from about one inch to two and three-quarter inches.

Mr. Tanner, who brought us to the site, has two old rifle barrels and a number of stone hammers in his possession which he collected in the district. Most of these, however, were found at least three-quarters of a mile from the site of the fort. He told us that when he was a youngster going to school, he knew of two skeletons, one about three-quarters of a mile east of the fort and the other about one and a half miles south, and of an Indian grave with two rifle barrels lying crossed on top.

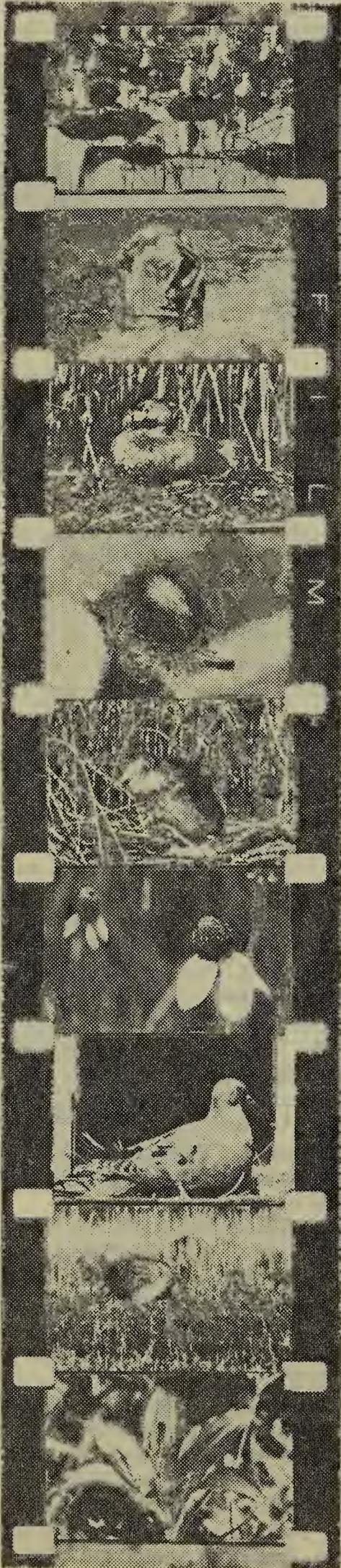
## The Trials of a Nature Photographer

Fred G. Bard

WITH our field activities during the summer, we are filming Natural History subjects on 16 mm. motion picture at sound speed, and 35 mm. Kodachromes. These we hope will work into extension services to stimulate and assist conservation education in the schools and the public.

When I review some of the events during these picture taking trips, I realize they are of interest to the subscribers in the Blue Jay, and some who are camera enthusiasts. A great deal of enjoyment can be captured by turning back the records of another day as well as contributing to much needed Natural History knowledge. It is our desire through the Blue Jay to encourage these enthusiasts and wherever possible assist them in the problems of picture taking. One of the most interesting pamphlets to read published recently, is a bulletin, "Museum Pictorial" Number one by Alfred Bailey, Director of the Denver Museum of Natural History. This is an accurate interesting approach to the Subject. There is no "hokus pokus," or great secrecy about Nature Photography, all it requires is suitable equipment, and time to allow weather conditions and behavior of the subject to work out for the desired results. There are several methods one might use in obtaining Natural History pictures, but there is no question the most suitable is a reflex camera and telephoto lenses. The miniature camera for color or black and white is in a class by itself for still pictures. In addition we are using the motion picture camera for natural history films. We have made a beginning on 35 mm. transparencies by the use of remote controls, but each time it would mean disturbing the subject to wind the film and cock the shutter. Here the owner of telephoto lenses has a distinct advantage. The other accessory that provides us with an opportunity to make the Natural History pictures and observe behaviours, is portable blinds. We have made these from page wire, and by cutting out several of the top strands and doming it over together at the top. This is covered with a cotton covering and painted in camouflage colors. We have on many occasions sat in the blinds and had birds sit on top of the blind, with our ear within an inch or two of the sitting bird. In bird blinds one often has to wait several hours, perhaps the longest this last summer, had been six and one half hours at one time. It is disappointing when the birds don't behave the way they should and the weather is anything but ideal, but at the end of each season we find the results sufficiently encouraging to make the entire venture very worthwhile.

This brings to mind a few instances. I will mention these to point out a few of the diffi-



culties you have to laugh off, then start over again. After having given a show at Yorkton for the Fish and Game league, we travelled back to Ralph Steuck's home at Abernethy to obtain some pictures on the dance of the Sharp-tailed Grouse. We arrived at Ralph's home at one thirty a.m. and hurried off to bed. The alarm rang, and Ralph called me at two thirty, needless to say it was difficult to awaken. Twenty-five minutes from Ralph's home we were well established in the bird blinds and waited eagerly. Long before dawn, the Sharp-tailed Grouse flew in and by the time daylight was breaking, a total of 60 birds had visited the grounds and were active in dancing. It was still a long wait until sunrise and sufficient light for color photography. I contented myself with the things that were going on around me in that quiet spring morning. While it was still dark, I heard a singing Horned Lark high in the sky, and it sang for fully half an hour. Birds sang as they awakened still in the darkness, many night migrants were identified, passing over. In the stillness of this spring morning, the sun gradually came up amid the chorus of birds, and with the Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing around me! I recall it as one of the finest spring mornings I can ever remember. There was hardly a breath of air and each sound carried long distances.

As the sun peeped over the horizon, I frequently used the light meter to see how close I was getting to photographic light, by 7 o'clock light was built up to a point where I was able to make the odd shot, perhaps prematurely. By seven thirty the light was now really worthwhile, and I was mentally pushing birds into position for action shots. My attention was then attracted to the tinkling of cowbells, and looking towards the farm nearby, I observed the farmer opening the corral gate, allowing the cattle to go out to pasture. Unhappily the cattle chose to travel through the dancing ground and frightened all the dancing Sharp-tails away. There ended this filming episode.

Another time while on the property of Athol Sweet at Valeport, we had several ideal drumming logs selected for Ruffed Grouse pictures. Blinds had been put up previously

and by now we knew the birds were quite at home within the site of the bird blinds. Fred Lahrman, of the Museum, was with me when, after thorough examination, we selected one of the sites where I would stay. The suitable light angle would be in the afternoon, so we contented ourselves, for three hours, filming other subjects, mainly early spring flowers and tree blossoms.

On further examination I had found a site other than the one I had chosen as it seemed to be more suitable. The grouse were drumming steadily and the situation looked ideal. Fred had not returned when I chose to enter the blind, so I left a note for him at the steering wheel, telling him where I would be.

After waiting for about two hours, I noticed the bird walking along the woodland floor to its drumming log. When within a foot or two of the drumming log, my companion, intent on nature subjects, walked through the woods close enough to the blind to frighten the grouse away. So ended my first attempt. We agreed that there was still time to obtain pictures so I again entered the blind. Within an hour and a half after entering, the birds returned to drum on the log. Its performance was beautiful, and I was quite happy with the results. But alas! on changing the film I found that the sprocket had torn the film and I hadn't exposed a foot. There ended attempt number two.

Not the least bit discouraged we decided to return another day. On our arrival at the abandoned farm buildings, we obtained a few flower pictures and waited for the angle of the sun to be about right before entering the blinds. About the time the light was right a farm truck drove into the yard. These were salvage people who had purchased a stationary engine and chose to break it up with sledge hammers in order to load it into the truck. Needless to say, with all that noise around, the birds simply didn't show up that afternoon. In the season of 1952 we will return and I hope will be successful in obtaining the pictures of the Ruffed Grouse.

Mr. Lahrman was established at Madge Lake to collect faunal material for the Museum and had located several ideal nesting sites for pictures. The first we chose to photo-

graph was that of the Loon. Sitting on an orange packing box, in hip waders, I waited inside the blind for the birds to return. However, after spending two hours in the blind, something happened to the packing box. I noticed the angle of vision seemed to be getting lower all the time. Then I became aware that I was sitting within one half inch of the surface of the water — the packing case had simply collapsed. Well, the Loons had to be abandoned for the time being. On another occasion at another Loon nesting site, the adult birds were working close to the nest and I was quite sure of obtaining pictures within a few minutes, when a Bittern walked in and stood near the nest. The Loons made several lunges to drive the birds away but were not successful. After waiting five and a half hours, I was not able to take any pictures of Loons on their nests.

One afternoon while obtaining footage of young Red-winged Blackbirds being fed by their parents, my best sequence shot ended with the female swallowing the excreta of the young. I was hoping that she would carry them away as she usually does.

One dull rainy afternoon we found three young Bitterns in a nest. Two backed away with a hissing noise, intended to frighten. The third gave the same hissing noise but through the opened mouth we noticed a skin covering, like a fish bladder. It appeared bluish grey and filled the throat cavity. The neck was distended and stiff to the touch. We had seen nothing like this before. Unfortunately the rain prevented our taking pictures.

On Wascana Lake, one day this fall, I saw a spider resting on the water surface. It was large and appeared to measure one and three-quarters inches across. The camera was set up on the tripod for two hours waiting for the sky to brighten. As time passed it grew darker so I packed the camera. All this time the spider remained motionless. Taking one of the marsh grasses I touched the spider, thinking it would scurry for cover. Instead it drew in its legs and disappeared beneath the surface of the water. Some day I hope to find out more about this spider.

Hunting and Fishing is sport, but it never compares with the satis-

faction of obtaining good Natural History pictures. There is the satisfaction of achievement and the joy of seeing your subject free to continue its interesting life.

In bringing you a few of our treasures I would like to emphasize that "there is no magic about obtaining these Natural History pictures — it only requires the equipment and the patience to wait." Speaking from a Museum point of view, I am willing to assist anyone interested in beginning this type of activity. The results will reward you for your interest.

In this respect I would like to add my sincere thanks to our editor, Mr. Lloyd Carmichael, for the excellent progress he is making in photographing our wild flowers; also to Mr. Fred Lahrman, of the Museum, who is doing similar work. These fine Kodachrome stills are being added to our library. When ready for distribution to the schools they will be appreciated by many.

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## The Wonderful Ways of Nature

*E. T. Scott, Regina*

**M**Y sister, who lives in Sarnia, was telling me of a Robin that had her nest in one of the nearby trees, on their property.

On this particular day the Robin was frantically flying around my sister, obviously trying to attract her attention.

The conduct of the bird being similar to that of a distraught mother when her child was in danger, caused my sister to make an immediate investigation in an effort to determine the cause of this unusual conduct. The nest was not too high for inspection.

My sister got to the nest and found that one of the youngsters had attempted to swallow a worm that was far too large for its throat. The Mother Bird could not remove the worm without aid, so she hurriedly sought it forthwith, and the first person that she saw happened to be my sister, who was able to remove the obstruction from the choking child.

The Mother bird was placated, the wee one was saved from choking to death, and sister went on her way, more amazed then ever at the wonderful ways of Nature!

## A Friendly Bluebird

*Kenneth Knox, Clair, Sask.*

WITH winter fast approaching and most of our summer birds gone, one cannot help but wonder if our special friends will come back to us another year.



The accompanying photographs will show what I mean by a special friend, which of course, is a Mountain Bluebird. They commenced to build their nest on the fifteenth of May, and chose the out-house for their site, which more often than not in past years was occupied by the cheery little House Wren. The female Bluebird in particular became very friendly. On July the second, much to my amazement, she landed on my hand for a moth which I had held out for her. She soon be-



came a friend also to visitors, and would take a moth or even dozens of them held out for her by anyone who had a few minutes to spare. A piece of dry leaf would bring her down if a moth wasn't handy. She would fly with it to a tree, drop the leaf and wait for a better handout.

During the following thirty days there was only one when she missed having moths given to her. On August the first Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird and a family of six left us, the babies having tried their wings four or five days before that. Up until the last the mother still accepted handouts of moths which by this time were getting smaller and smaller but, no doubt, were greatly appreciated.

One may wonder where the supply of moths came from. Well the greatest supply was found in the binder canvases. Nearly every day I would unroll them, kill the moths, feed just a few and keep the rest for later on in the day. I would then roll up the canvases in preparation for another catch the following day. Soon the Bluebird caught on to where I got the moths, and each morning when I would go to the garage to unroll the canvases she would be there too, and would fly down to help herself, should I be too slow in giving some of the moths to her. Moths were also caught under cardboard that I tacked to the walls of the granaries. Two of my friends, who enjoyed feeding the Bluebirds, on two occasions, brought moths from their homes to save the supply here.

I think it is quite a thing to have a pet Bluebird around home, but the time that it landed on my hand when I was a quarter of a mile from home was an occasion that I will not forget very soon. On July 24, while I was watching the breakers turning over the good old sod, the tree stumps and even the worms, I could not help but notice the busy Blackbirds and Bluebirds following the outfit. I found a worm, and there being a few Bluebirds close by, thought I would hold the worm out in my hand to see if our pet was one of them. Sure enough, in less than a minute didn't our friend come and land in my hand for a few seconds, but to my surprise she flew away without the worm.

## Red Crossbills at Yorkton

Stuart Houston

**F**LOCKS of Red Crossbills in adult and immature plumages were seen at Yorkton by Cliff Shaw and other observers, from June 21 to June 29th. They reached their peak numbers on June 27th. Two specimens were sent to the Provincial Museum at Regina. Judge McKim reported in the last Blue Jay that scores of these birds were present at Melfort on June 28th. What other localities were visited by Crossbills this summer? Did they settle down to nesting activities this summer, and if so, where and when?

## Yorkton Records

**F**LOCKS of Pine Siskins were noted in Yorkton during the first three weeks in July. These birds are erratic wanderers, as are the Crossbills.

Red-breasted Nuthatches seemed commoner than ever before. They were first noted Sept. 4 by Dr. Stuart Houston and last noted Oct. 30 by Mrs. Stuart Houston.

There were several reports of Belted Kingfishers, though they are usually uncommon migrants at Yorkton. At least ten were noted by Dr. and Mrs. Stuart Houston while canoeing along two miles of York Lake shoreline on Oct. 7.

A Hooded Merganser was shot Sept. 18 at Rousay Lake by R. M. Baldwin. This constitutes the third record for the Yorkton district.

A Golden-crowned Kinglet was found dead on Tupper Ave., Yorkton, on Oct. 9, 1951, by Andrew Burant. This is the first record for the Yorkton district.

An adult female Mallard, banded by Stuart Houston at Rousay Lake, near Yorkton, on August 3, 1945, was shot by Bert Rousay, less than half a mile from where it was banded, about October 1, 1951. The bird was therefore at least seven years old when shot.

## Far Travellers

**A** juvenile female Blue-winged Teal, banded by Stuart Houston at Leech Lake, near Yorkton, on August 15, 1948, was shot December

19, 1948 at Bogota, Colombia, South America.

An adult male Blue-winged Teal, banded by Stuart Houston at Rousay Lake on August 22, 1944, was shot 75 kilometers northwest of Maracaibo, Venezuela, on April 5, 1949.

Dr. Houston has previously had reports of Blue-winged Teal from Dominican Republic, Cuba and Porto Rico, in the West Indies.

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*To-day I saw the dragon-fly  
Come from the wells where he did  
lie.*

*An inner impulse rent the veil  
Of his old husk; from head to tail  
Came out clear plates of sapphire  
mail.*

*He dried his wings: like gauze they  
grew;  
Through crofts and pastures wet  
with dew  
A living flash of light he flew.*

—Tennyson.

## Condemned to the Skin-Stretcher

Madeline B. Runyan

**O**NE Sunday afternoon we surprised four badgers at the edge of a grain field. To reach their holes they had to come toward us, which was a real ordeal for them. It was amusing to see them flatten themselves to the ground as they approached.

As these animals are great rodent killers we believe they ought to be protected, but one big fat fellow over-stepped himself when he dug a hole in our neighbour's henhouse and killed fifty hens. Needless to say, that badger ended up on a skin-stretcher.

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*The April 1951 issue of "Bird Banding" reported a Black-crowned Night Heron banded July 9, 1932 near Indian Head, Sask., by the late George H. Lang, was found in July 1942 near Weyburn, Sask. Only six other Night Herons have been known to live ten years or longer.*

—Dr. Stuart Houston.

## A Model Bird Law

ACCORDING to a recent release of the National Audubon Society hawks and owls have a lot of friends in Connecticut. That became apparent this fall when the governor signed a model bird protection bill that makes it unlawful to shoot any species of hawk or owl in that state. This places Connecticut among the leaders in bird conservation.

A provision of the new law permits farmers to destroy those individual hawks caught in the act of doing damage to poultry. Pointing out that only occasional hawks develop into poultry stealers, the National Audubon Society said this provision will protect farmers and at the same time prevent misinformed persons from meting out "vigilante justice" to all hawks and owls because of the misdeeds of a few of them.

The National Audubon Society believes the new law will be regarded as a model "because it recognizes that the average person cannot distinguish among the various hawks and owls, hence the statute protects them all except that hawks may be taken when in the act of destroying poultry."

There has been a marked change in public attitude towards birds of prey since the turn of the century. It has not been very long since no legal protection was offered to eagles, hawks and owls throughout Canada and the United States. Extensive studies of the economic relationships of these birds has produced evidence that they are friends of man and play an important role in controlling rodent and insect populations, as well as their general function in the ecological scheme of things.

The growing army of hobbyists who observe birds has become increasingly impressed with the grace and skill of the birds of prey and has joined with conservation and farm organizations to support legislation protecting hawks and owls.

This movement has resulted in definite action in all but six of the states to the south of us, and we feel that similar legislation should be enacted throughout Canada. The BLUE JAY expresses the hope that a committee of the Saskatchewan National History Society be set up in the near future to make an extensive study of the Connecticut legislation, and that that committee approach the Saskatchewan government with the request that they enact legislation similar to the "model" bird law of Connecticut.

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### Some Winter Friends

*Ronald Hooper, Somme*

LAST winter when my brother and I had a camp in the bush, we had many opportunities to observe Nature. We always ate with the shack door open and the Black-capped Chickadees and Canada Jays would come in and eat the crumbs we dropped. Blue Jays, Pine Grosbeaks, Redpolls and Juncos fed nearby in the straw where we fed the horses.

One day we cut a piece of rind, about a foot square, from a piece of pork and nailed it to a tree in front of the door. In a few minutes the Chickadees were busy on it, and a White-breasted Nuthatch ran down the tree to enjoy the feast. They were interrupted however by the arrival of a Hairy Woodpecker.

After pecking awhile, the thrifty fellow would drop to the ground and eat the scraps he had dropped. Soon he seemed to have his fill, so he grabbed the rind and tried to pull it from the tree. When this didn't work, he cocked his head back and viewed the situation more thoroughly. He then pecked all around the nail until the rind fell to the ground, and would have flown away with it had we not stopped him.

Another time I put a fish-head on a stump. A red squirrel came along, and he, like the woodpecker, seemed to eat on it until he was filled. Then he picked it up in his mouth and ran through the bush with it (it was as big as he was). When he tried to run up a tree with it he fell over backwards so he was contented to pull it under a fallen tree.

I am looking forward to seeing my little friends again this winter.

## OUR HABITAT

*Arthur Ward, Swift Current*

ON taking up residence on the homestead, there slowly unfolded to our gaze, "The little People" doing the duties assigned to them in the habitat here, congenial to their needs. Dame Nature reigned there in this reserve The Great Creator had established. We did not see the wolverine, the bear, the lynx and moose, simply because this habitat did not require their attention, nor could it fill their needs.

Some herds of antelope here and there grazed on the rich luxuriant grass which also provided cover essential for great quantities of mushrooms growing profusely in favoured spots. The little kit fox with its conspicuous brush, extremely shy, always taking care to provide itself with three exits from its shallow underground abode, succumbed to the wiles of man and with its yapping bark in the night, gradually disappeared.

There had been no one to dispute the hills the badger threw up, or the gopher's right to fill up its larder with roots and herbaceous tid bits—no kindergarten to teach them to stick to this diet and leave the farmers' grain alone. They therefore prospered with the help of coverage provided by the growing grain, thus enabling the coyote to increase by the same means by feeding upon the more plentiful supply of gophers, rabbits and mice, unaided by the now vanishing kit fox.

The booming of the prairie chicken, (now gone from our district) still lingers in our memory of those early morning symphonies, augmented by the prominent and plentiful chesnut coloured longspurs. They filled the air with song as they returned from aloft with wings high over back. They too decreased because of the plough and close cropped pastures and were gradually replaced by the lark bunting with its similar flight song.

We noticed circles in the grass, several feet in diameter, with the outer rim of extremely rich deep green, contrasting greatly with the inner and surrounding grass. The rim, mostly studded with mushrooms, suggested high qualities of pro-

duction. These occurring in varying distances drew many conjectures as to their origin. One solution offered was that the blood of a buffalo killed there had acted as a fertilizer—but why the almost perfect circle? This still had us wondering.

Small depressions occurring intermittently were generally conceded as buffalo wallows. Yet, having discovered the turf burning in spots during favourable circumstances after a prairie fire, led us to the belief that this may have contributed to the forming of these depressions.

The hand of man, was now becoming apparent in our otherwise well balanced habitat. The development of 2-4D and other potent weed killers poses a threat to bird life which may be even greater than caused by over use of insecticides. The planting of trees around farm buildings added greater impetus to sustaining newer species that would otherwise have proceeded north. This result greatly demonstrated the need of larger areas planted to trees to the extent of eighty acres, where not so provided by nature.

Hawking the heritage of our vast wildlife resources for the purpose of a scanty revenue has reached proportions unprecedented. The woodcock, wilson's snipe and coot are not idling around for the purpose of providing a target for the so-called sportsman, but rather they are Nature's policeman doing the duties assigned to them within their habitat.

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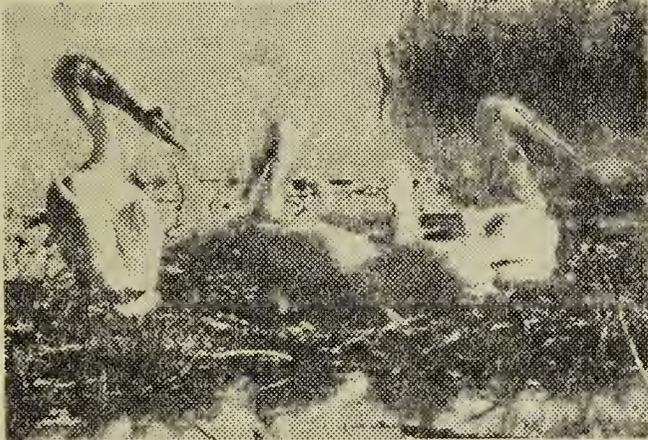
## Seeing the City Sights

*Robert Spring, Regina*

A porcupine visited Regina one early morning late this summer. It was peering through the window of a brightly lighted men's clothing store when first noticed by a constable. The police phoned the S.P. C.A. On arrival they threw a rug over the sixty pound animal and transported it to a more suitable natural habitat, not far from the city. Two hundred and sixty quills were later taken out of the car seat and rug.

# The Tragedy of Last Mountain Lake Sanctuary

*Fred G. Bard*



*Nesting Colonies, Last Mountain  
—Bard.*

THE bird sanctuary at the north end of Last Mountain Lake is a favorite spot for the museum staff to field-check. Here thousands of colonial birds nest each year on the shallow islands. We visited these islands soon after the ice had gone last spring and found the colonies of Pelicans, Gulls and Cormorants already egg laying. Following the spring runoff, we visited the area again, only to find that the lake had risen a foot and already sections of the islands had flooded and wind action had eroded a section of the colony away. We again visited the colony in June to find that the water had risen another foot. This, I understand, was partly due to the unusual runoff and to the dyke breaking at Euston junction at the south end.

With the boat we circled the Pelican island now only a reef with a few tule reeds among the rocks projecting above the surface of the water. We moved on to the Gull island and found hundreds of nests washed away—nests, eggs beaked with the projecting egg tooth, and young—floating, then sinking; everything surrounded by water. The air was filled with excited screaming gulls.

This catastrophe is similar to the sorry plight of war and flood ravaged humans. We stood there unhappy amid this pitiful scene of destruction and yet were helpless

to raise a hand. Some young gulls were a moving mass of ants that were driven by the flood waters to the last dry places available. These insects covered the young gulls, the last rocks, the weed stalks and willow limbs. We never saw anything like this in our lives. We estimated that 1800 nests of Pelicans, Ring-billed Gulls, Cormorants, Ducks and Common Terns were completely destroyed.

Among a few weed stalks, a Red-winged Blackbird had woven its nest. The five blue eggs, just seven inches above the rising water, were the last to survive. Soon they also were destroyed in one of the worst years for colony birds on the lake.

Mr. Swanston and I visited these islands on November 20th, crossing the lake on foot. The falling snow, whipped into a ground blizzard, made visibility very poor. Pelican Island was completely covered by water and the last few rocks above water were covered by the expanding ice sheets. Clumps of willows were five to six feet above the water at the north and south ends of the Gull island. This island was also covered by water and only a few stones protruded above the ice. This condition, however, seemed to suit the requirements of a muskrat, for his warm house stood high above the ice.

I have learned by enquiry that the Gulls, Terns, Pelicans and Cormorants made an attempt to re-nest on the Perry point because sheep had disturbed colonies formerly established on points. We were prompted to discuss this matter with the Perrys. They have agreed to allow us to fence the point. In the spring we will round up a few Natural History Members and sportsmen to complete this project.

Nature, at times, cuts heavily into the ranks and nothing can be done to prevent this great loss. There are, however, many opportunities to lend a helping hand. I know that we can assist nature and be happier if we prove we are interested by active participation when the need arises.

# The Weather in Relation to Fall Migrations

*William Niven, Sheho*

**T**HE fall migration is over now (November 15) for the season as winter has set in in earnest and the summer birds are now far away. As compared to last season the real winter started slightly later this year—November 12 as against November 7 last season—but we had much more cold winter-like weather this year from October 17 on, and even some before that.

It has been a very unusual season all through. Our last winter was long and severe with a great amount of snow, followed by a heavy down-pour in early spring, flooding lowlands and sloughs. This provided ideal conditions for all the water fowl and those birds inhabiting the vicinity of marshes. But the cool wet summer was not so favorable for the land birds. Many started nesting much later and had fewer broods than in a normal year, yet some birds such as the Robin were around in much larger numbers than usual and nested everywhere.

The fall migration started about the normal time—August 15—with the movement of Sandpipers and gatherings of Tree Swallows. Canada Geese were first noted from further north, August 21. About August 27, after a heavy rain, a wave of Bluebirds, Robins, Vesper Sparrows and Barn Swallows gathered. The Warblers were first noted from the north September 5. On September 11 a large flock of Hawks (species unidentified) were noticed circling over and going southeast. At the beginning of the shooting season, September 17, some geese were around feeding on fields, but not as many as last year.

Frequent rain showers during the fall, and cool weather caused many birds to go south early. A Belted Kingfisher was seen September 19. This was the first one noted here for many years. The first light frost occurred on September 20, followed by more cool, wet, rainy weather, culminating in a killing frost, September 22 and 23, followed by light snow showers. Some Barn Swallows were then noted migrating south.

The 24th was very cold and on the 25th a severe frost occurred—15 degrees of it—killing all garden stuff. Some Barn Swallows were still flying around but there was no food for them. A heavy snow started at noon on the 25th and continued all the next day. It cleared on the 27th but was very cold. This finished off the Barn Swallows that were around and did not migrate in time. The Sparrows, Juncos and Robins stayed all through it but must have had a hard time finding food. The last of the Crows disappeared, going southeast, on October 1.

The last Whistling Swan was seen October 24th and Mallard Ducks on November 10. A few Juncos and Tree Sparrows were still around then, but since have either gone on or have been frozen.

The winter birds have been all seen except Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, October 3; Snow Buntings, October 8; Common Redpoles, October 26; Pine Grosbeaks, October 27. So far this season none of these are plentiful. One Snowy Owl was observed sitting on a haystack November 11.

The common Field Mice are very numerous here—in fact they are present in millions. They will probably do a great deal of damage to any grain left unthreshed in the fields over winter.



## Just Around Home

*Kenneth Knox, Clair*

**M**ANY birds made their homes right around us this past summer. In an area of not more than three acres, nests were built and the following families were raised to maturity. Wrens 4, Robins 2, Mountain Bluebirds 3, Barn Swallows 2 and Yellow Warblers 1.

These nests were all located near my home, the most of them nested in the area around the house, the rest in the barnyard. I could not help but have a pair of Catbirds destroyed this year, and I had good reason for doing so. I located their nest early and left it alone in the hope that they would stay on their side of the fence, so to speak. Actually their nest also was in the house yard. However, I soon noticed that they were around some of the other birds' nesting places more than their own, and remembering what they did last year to a Bluebird's nest, I decided that I couldn't stay around and protect all the other birds' nests from this destroyer.

By having the pair destroyed all the rest of the birds had no trouble in raising their families. I surely prefer having the birds mentioned above than a pair of Catbirds.

As far as plumage is concerned, the Bluebirds, Warblers, etc. are far more colourful, and I believe that their songs are much more pleasant. All that I have heard out of a Catbird is a continual "wa, wa, wa". probably it takes a few years for them to develop musical notes.

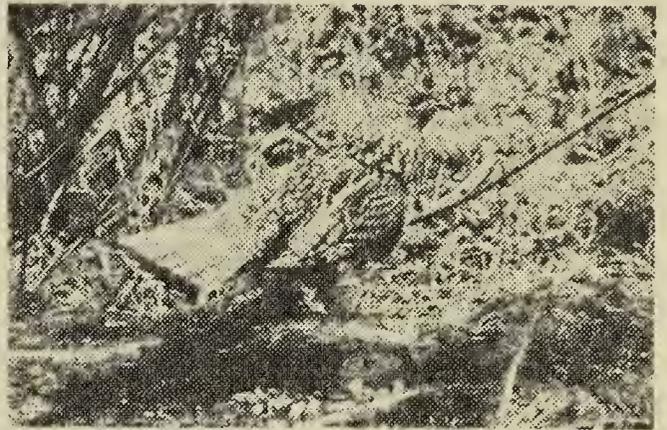
I am quite sure that there was another nest of Catbirds across the road. They were not disturbed. They would be as welcome as all other birds if only they could be trusted.

I greatly missed the Baltimore Oriole's visit this year, but hope they will return to us next year. Just a few days ago I happened to look out of a window, and there was none other than the Blue Jay himself. It was the first one that I had seen for about six years.

Talking about the Blue Jay, I think the BLUE JAY magazine is a great publication. Had it not been for Mr. Yerex telling me about it, I would have missed a lot of enjoyment that I have already had through reading the magazine.

## Ruffed Grouse Rhumba

*Fred G. Bard*



—Photo by Bard.

**O**N November 8th while on field work along the Pipestone, south of Whitewood, I saw a most unusual sight. The moon was already well up and the afternoon drawing to a close. Emerging from a poplar bluff, I came upon a grassy clearing. In the centre was a Ruffed Grouse shaking its head, its tail fanned out, its ruffs spread and extended forward, framing the head.

Then to my surprise it took three steps, hopped forward and shook its head, then lowering the head it almost touched the ground and finished this by resuming again a normal pose. It paused for a few seconds with the tail fanned out, its ruffs extended forward much like a strutting gobbler. The performance was repeated; three steps—a hop—head shaking—lowering the head nearly to the ground—resuming normal position. Rehearsing this dance at least twenty times, it crossed the grassy clearing and disappeared into the poplar bluffs on the far side, still dancing the "Ruffed Grouse Rhumba," as only a Ruffed Grouse could.

In this perfect fall setting I wondered, "Is this", as I have heard, "the season of the crazy moon?" Surely this strange ritual must be sheer exuberance.



## An Embarrassing Predicament

*Doug Gilroy*

WHEN I began my hobby of nature photography, one of my first subjects was a fellow who bears the fancy latin name of "Miphitis hudsonica", but in plain ordinary English it means "Prairie Skunk".

One of these striped kittens had a habit of visiting a certain slough in the early hours of the day where he picked up a few luscious morsels for dessert before retiring for the day. So it was that I took up my camera and set out in the hopes of obtaining a fine kodachrome of this little gentleman (?).

Sure enough, there he was trotting along beside the fence, just leaving the slough. It was a beautiful peaceful morning and the little skunk looked quite innocent and harmless. However, as I approached him, he began to hurry a little faster and his bushy tail began to stand straight up, with the long hairs standing out like a Fuller brush. This, I knew, meant he was no innocent youngster. He carried a gun and it was loaded for action.

I scouted around in front of him, not too hurriedly, in an attempt not to alarm him and yet head him off from the direction of the valley where he was going. He was a determined little cuss and had no notion of changing his course. "Alright," thought I "I'll just stand in your way and let you come right up to me. As long as you keep your artillery pointed the other way I've nothing to worry about."

On he came, and I chuckled gleefully to myself at how easily I was going to get his picture. When about four feet away from me he stopped and stamped his feet angrily while I began to focus my camera. At that very second the little crook let go with a "block buster". The air that was so sweet and pure suddenly became so thick and vile that it was enough to blind a man. I felt a liquid running down my cheeks and off my chin. The little brute must have put a curve on it—or was it a slight breeze that blew the spray my way? At any rate I was shot right in the head.

This was a very embarrassing condition to go around in, so I sneaked back to the barn—just like any dog would do—and there I got an idea. Pouring out a liberal amount of gasoline in a basin, I washed my face thoroughly in it. This was followed by a shave.

After that treatment no one made any remarks regarding my fragrance—well, not very many anyway.

### The Hazelcliffe Fisher

*H. M. Rayner*

MOST interesting to me of all items in the last BLUE JAY was the note from Hazelcliffe about the killing of a fisher in the Qu'Appelle Valley. Has it been verified whether this was a wild animal or an escapee from a fur farm? If the former, it is really a remarkable record to find a fisher, an animal of the wilderness, so deep in settled country.

As a youth in the opening years of the century I did some hunting and trapping myself. My mentor in woodcraft ways was a veteran trapper who had spent his life in the wilderness on trail and trapline. I remembered asking him once if he had ever seen a fisher running alive. His face lit up with a vivid memory. "Only once," he said, "just once, many years ago, I saw one. He was galloping, with his back arched and his great tail streaming out behind—a rare sight, boy, a rare sight!"

### Howard the Crane Succumbs

SAN ANTONIO, Tex., Nov. 22, (AP). — Howard the whooping crane died of a gunshot wound.

His death makes another gap in the vanishing flock of 32, the only known whooping cranes in the world.

Howard came from the far north Nov. 3 to spend the winter on a sun-bathed island in the Gulf of Mexico near Corpus Christi, Tex.

Manager Julian Howard of the Arkansas wildlife refuge noticed he dragged a leg in flight. Later manager Howard found Howard on the ground, unable to stand. One of his pipe-stem legs had been broken by a bullet.

#### Put To Bed

Last Saturday, Howard the crane was put to bed in a crate of hay and taken to the San Antonio zoo for treatment. Howard failed to respond to treatment.

## Muskrats in Winter

*Fred W. Lahrman, Regina*

**V**ERY often we learn something new about our most common animals and birds, which makes us realize more and more how admirably they adapt themselves to seasonal changes, weather conditions, etc. As each new page in their lives is turned, we feel a deeper appreciation and sympathy for the story of their lives. Sometimes we find the page by mere chance, sometimes it is pointed out to us by a friend, and often we find that it had been open to us all the time, if only we had been observant enough to see it.

It was on a brisk sunny morning early in November that I learned something more about how the Muskrat is able to live and carry on its daily activities, even though its world has become a frozen solid mass of ice. While Mr. Bard and I were driving past Tregarva slough, we noticed

several Muskrat houses and pushups jutting up through the ice and snow. Stopping to investigate, Mr. Bard pointed out a series of runways which were clearly visible under the ice, leading out in several different directions from the nearest house. Following one of these we soon found a muskrat travelling along the runway. It caught sight of us and let out a little stream of bubbles as it slowly sank from sight. As the ice was not yet frozen to the bottom, he was able to travel another route.

These runways lead and branch out from house to house and from one pushup to another where they pause for air. By continued use of these runways, the yare able to keep them open all winter, even though the ice freezes to the bottom, and the Muskrat is able to keep in touch with all of his favorite Marsh and food supply.

## BRUNO

*Evelyn Casson, Cater, Sask.*



**A**S winter draws closer the bears around our district are going about the business of putting on those layers of fat that are so important to them for their long winter period of hibernation.

As there was very little wild fruit around here this year the bears have been seen raiding the crops of ripened grain to fatten on the rich kernels of wheat and barley. Although I have lived in this district many years and each summer I have seen signs of bears, this fall was the first time I have had the good fortune to see a bear in the wild state.

One afternoon about the first of September "the boss" was stooking barley in a field west of the house. He was working near a clump of black poplars. He had just finished stooking one row and was starting on the next when something caused him to glance back and there at the stook

he had just set up was a bear calmly pulling out barley stalks and eating off the heads. To say he was startled would be putting it mildly. If he had seen the bear in the distance first or had had any warning one was near by it wouldn't have startled him so much, but to turn around and to find one so close was just too much—so he came home.

Together we walked back to the field to see if it might still be there. Sure enough, there he was, sitting in the shade of a black poplar munching the heads of a barley sheaf. We walked to within fifty feet of him before he saw us. When he did so and stood up he seemed to be over five feet tall.

As we turned to go we saw him calmly sit down again and go on with his dinner which we had so rudely interrupted.

For a day or two afterward the boys were out with the rifle to see if they could get him. I hoped in my heart they wouldn't find him. They didn't—not a trace. I hope they never find him and I like to think he may live to enjoy many summers of sunshine and good barley sheaves and long winter sleeps in some snug den under a windfall.

## MOTHER COYOTE

*H. M. Rayner, Ituna, Sask.*

IT was on a cool windy day last June that I set out to visit a range of low hills about three miles from my home. These hills run for about a mile across an untenanted section of land, too rough and hilly for cultivation. The northern slopes of the hills are densely wooded. I was making for a point near the centre of the section, where I hoped to find some cranberry bushes in flower. It is a remote secluded spot, a full half mile from any road and nearly a mile to the nearest dwelling.

Before beginning ascent of the hill I had selected, I had to cross a chain of small sloughs, surrounded by a dense growth of poplar and willow. One of these bluffs extended for some distance up the hillside. From habit I kept out of sight among the trees, and moved silently on rubber-soled canvass shoes. I broke cover, and not ten yards in front of me lay the largest female coyote it has been my luck to see. She had her back to the westering sun, and was plainly enjoying its pleasant warmth. With forelegs outstretched in front of her and head erect, she was looking intently toward the east, as if expecting something—perhaps the arrival of her mate with food. Beside her was the entrance to the den, and her fur was rubbed and dirty from many entries and exits.

Before this experience, I had hardly thought it possible to take a coyote so completely by surprise. I had approached against the wind, which carried away the scent, and what slight noise I made was no doubt covered by the rustling of leaves. I stood there in the open in full view, trying to be motionless and even to breathe gently. She continued her lookout to the east, quite unaware of my presence.

It was too good to last. Something—scent, sound, or instinct—warned her. Or could it have been just accident? At any rate, she turned her head and looked me straight in the face. Even then, for seconds, she did not get up, nor did her expression change. It seemed

she was so completely confident that no human being would ever disturb her well-chosen solitude, she could not believe her eyes. Then her expression changed from placid composure, first to intense surprise, then to consternation. She stood up, still looking at me with a comical half-incredulous look, as if she thought I might still turn out to be only a bad dream. Then she growled and trotted off a few yards. I advanced a step, whereupon she turned and barked. However, this was only a bit of bold bluffing, for when I kept on advancing, she prudently retreated, but without hurry.

I went up the hill to just beyond the den, and stood there. She went down the hill to the fringe of willow thickets, and disappeared among them. A few moments later she made a tremendous leap vertically upwards out of the bushes, to see what mischief I might be up to. She repeated these leaps every minute or so, shifting her ground a bit between each one.

I took up my station on a hill some 600 yards north-east of the den, and sat down to see what she would do. She followed me, and when I sat down, she sat down to watch me. I ate my lunch, (without which I never embark on a cross-country hike), and then continued eastward for half a mile. Mother coyote followed at a respectful distance. When at length I sat down again, she did the same.

I then turned north into the thick bush on the northern hillsides, and by walking about a mile, roughly in a semi-circle, approached the den from the north through the bush. She was back at the den, but was clearly expecting me this time, and took to the willows as before. I then headed for home, and she followed me for about half a mile.

Next day I went back, hoping that from some vantage point on the hills I might see the pups through my binoculars. But mother coyote was taking no chances. She had removed herself and her family to parts unknown.

## Rattlesnakes in Saskatchewan

By J. J. Deck, Mendham.

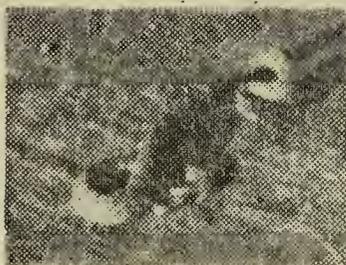


A four-footer held by the head with my catching stick.

ABOUT ten miles west of this town, among the sand hills and nearer to the south branch of the Saskatchewan River, I have seen and caught many rattlesnakes. In all I have seen about three kinds of these snakes but no Black Diamonds are to be found in this district.

As the years pass the rattlesnakes are moving to areas further east and north, following in the general direction of the river. I have seen snakes swim across the river on three different occasions. Depending on the swiftness of the current, they will land some distance down stream on the other side.

In the fall of the year they move back from the sand hills, towards the river, to den in for the winter. The dens are difficult to find but at certain times in October, on fine days, one can find nearly all the snakes one cares to see, close to the river. I engineered the killing of about fifty there in less than an hour.



Ready to Strike  
A picture of one a person can get up very close if he is daring enough, because the snake has to curl up to strike. They can do this very fast—

A rattlesnake usually gives one sufficient warning but on occasion I have nearly stepped on one before it sounded the alarm. To take a

lightning fast—but they can only strike out about one-third of their length, and that they will do only when teased, otherwise they make short jabs.

Ranchers report that they have lost cattle from snake bite. These cases, however, appear to be very rare. Horses are also scared and will shy off fast when they discover that a snake is close. Pigs, however, will make short work of the snake and will eat them. Snake venom will not affect them.

There have been a few cases of persons being bitten but not many. I know of three cases in about eight years. Of these three, one was an adult and two were children. It seems that the adult got too daring and tried to catch a medium sized snake by the tail. It snapped back and bit him on the hand. The children were bitten while at play. One was on the veranda of his home and the other was playing in the

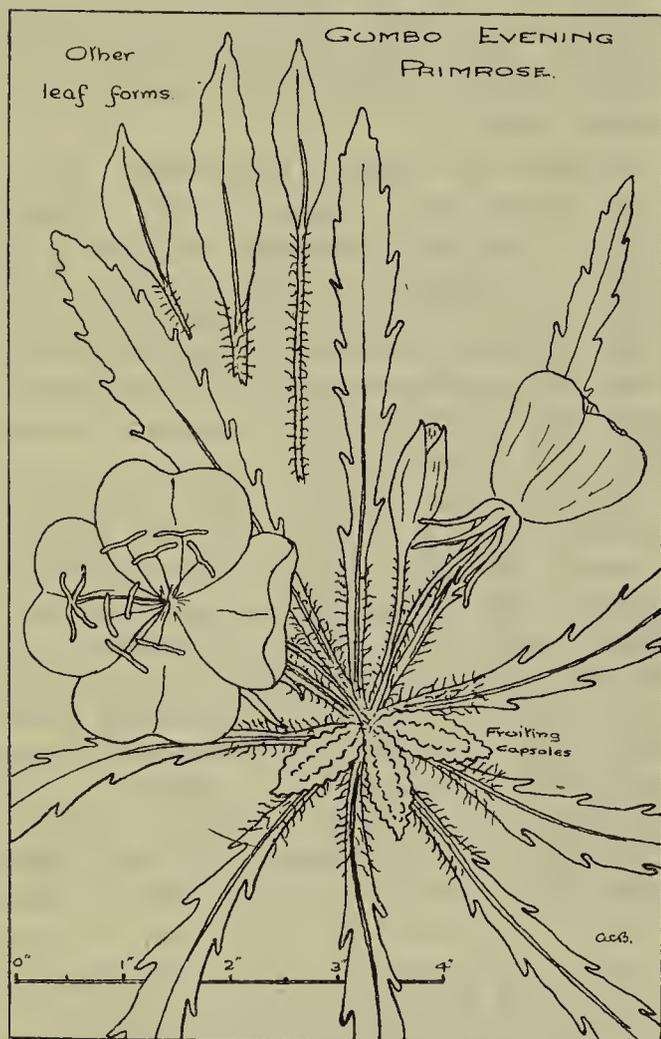


yard. Both were bitten at the ankle, as the snake will not strike up—just ahead. All recovered after being in the hospital for about three weeks.

Rattlesnakes are fond of robbing birds' nests of both eggs and young. One farmer related to me how, just in time, he discovered a rattler working itself up inside his granary. Among the rafters there was a sparrow's nest with young. The snake was making its way along the sill towards the nest. These snakes also have the peculiar habit of coiling up in the nests of hen houses after they have eaten the eggs.

# Saskatchewan's Sweetest Scented Flower

Archie Budd, Swift Current.



**P**ERHAPS the sweetest smelling native Saskatchewan flower is the Gumbo Evening-Primrose, *Oenothera caespitosa*, generally represented here by the variety *montana*. This is a low growing perennial of the *Onagraceae* or Evening Primrose family and is nearly caespitose or stemless, the leaf and flower stalks arising almost directly from the crown of the long tap root. The leaves are generally long lanceolate

with winged stalks, and vary in length from an inch to eight inches, and in form from entire margined to toothed, and generally have a pale mid-rib.

The flowers are very large and showy, from one and a half to three inches across, with four sepals, soon turning downwards, and four large white petals which open during the night but turn pink and wither in the late morning. Looking into the sweet scented open flower we find eight yellow stamens with their anthers horizontally on top of the filaments, and a yellow pistil consisting of a thin style with a four-lobed cross-like stigma on the summit. The fruit are rather hard, ovoid capsules from a half to one and a quarter inches long, borne closely on the root crown and ribbed with knobby ridges.

The Gumbo Evening-primrose is found on hillsides where the soil or subsoil is clay, and also on clay flats and coulee bottoms, and generally flowers during late May, June and early July. The typical form is practically hairless but most of our western plants are the variety *montana* which has a rough, white hairiness on the leaf stalks, flower-stems and base of the the plant.

In the native state the flowering period is fairly short but it has been found that under transplanting and cultivation it can be extended almost until freeze-up. It is a lovely plant for the garden with its showy, snow white petals and its golden yellow stamens and pistil and also the sweet, delicate scent in the early mornings.

## Golden Chokecherries

**W**E were surprised and pleased to receive from Mr. Cliff Shaw, during the first week in September, a package of golden-yellow chokecherries found in the vicinity of Yorkton.

Mr. Shaw admits that he was very skeptical about the reports of these berries until he and another naturalist friend went out and saw them. There were five trees, ten to fifteen feet high, all heavily loaded and growing among the common variety.

The farmer who owns the trees has known of them for about eight years. He reports that they ripen fully ten days earlier than the others, and are much sweeter.

Dr. G. F. Ledingham of the University reports that while a chokecherry with whitish to yellow fruits and described as "*leucocarpa*" is listed in Gray's manual of botany, the Yorkton find is the first received at the university. Neither he nor Dr. R. C. Russell, leading

authority on Saskatchewan plants, has ever heard of yellow chokecherries before.

Speaking at our Annual Meeting, Mr. D. R. Robinson, of the University Extension Department, said that similar berries had been located at two other points in the province.

## Lillies and Bluebells

C. Stuart Francis, Torch River

OUR beautiful Yellow Wild Lily had three lovely blooms this past season. The blooms lasted for quite a number of days before starting to wilt, which was probably due to the cooler temperature than is usual at that season. Our other unusual Wild Lily also had two nice blooms. The native Bluebell (*Tall Mertensia*) also seemed to have its blooming season just about double in length of time as compared with other years.

We were very interested in A. J. Breitung's article on "Carnivorous Plants", and hope to meet him personally some day. These plants are native to this area.

## A Hand Painted Guide to the Flowers and Birds of the Prairie

WE were very pleased and thrilled on receiving from Mr. Hugh McLaughlin, of Lewvan, an illustrated nature book of wild flowers and birds. But this is no ordinary nature book. It contains the original paintings of 36 common prairie flowers and 23 of our most common birds. The descriptive notes about each specimen gives extensive information about first appearance, habitat, family, environment, field marks, etc. It is a work of which the author may be justly proud. In respect to it Mr. McLaughlin writes:

"I couldn't lay my hands on a book that contained "my" wild flowers and birds, so I had them definitely identified and then drew a specimen of each.

That's how I feel about the BLUE JAY. We need a Natural History Magazine and Society in and for Saskatchewan. I appreciate the efforts of those who made and make it possible. You mentioned the "Kingdom of Nature"—and that in our Society one may enter with a love of flowers or birds or rocks, and that we all benefit from one another.

I don't imagine there is anything new or of value to the magazine in the contents of my little book—still it acts as a sort of ambassador to convey my interest and desire to help you."

## Random Botanical Notes

A. C. Budd

LAST fall several items were noted in the press regarding fall blooming of *Crocus Anemone*, and suggesting that such was unprecedented. This is not the case and I find Dr. G. M. Dawson reports away back in 1873 that these plants were blooming on August 7 and in the second week of September at Turtle Mountain and Long River. Last year I noted them on August 30 and this year several were blooming September 13. The Moss Phlox also occasionally shows fall flowering and in 1946 it bloomed near Webb on September 19, and this year I noted it on September 12 at Cadillac and on October 1 and 10 locally.

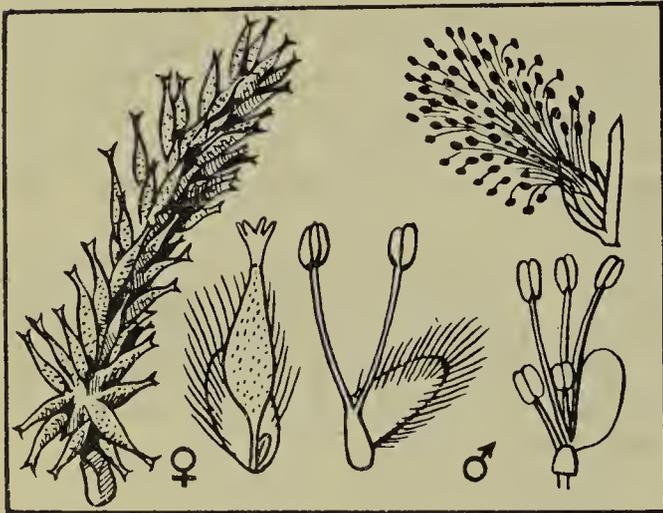
A plant of Milk Thistle, *Silybum Marianum*, has been found as a garden weed at East End, Saskatchewan. This is apparently the first record of this plant for the prairie provinces and was identified by Dr. C. Frankton of Ottawa.

Wild Pansy, *Viola arvensis*, was found north of Wilkie, Saskatchewan this fall. The only previous record seems to be that of Mr. L. T. Carmichael, who located it at Canora, Saskatchewan.

Bitter Cress, *Cardamine pennsylvanica*, was found last June in the Cypress Hills. All previous records seem to have been from the northern parts of the province.

# Key to the Willows of Saskatchewan

August J. Breitung



**T**HERE are approximately 300 species of willows (*Salix*) widely distributed, mainly in the temperate and arctic regions of the northern hemisphere. Of this number at least 24 species are represented in Saskatchewan.

Following is a key, based largely on leaf characters, to all the willows known to occur in Saskatchewan south of the 54th parallel. Its purpose is to inspire extensive observation, stimulate collecting and thus increase our knowledge of the native flora. The key is intended to serve as a means to identify readily the willows of the inhabited regions and as a companion work to "Notes on the Willows of Saskatchewan" by the late Dr. W. P. Fraser in *Can. Field-Nat.* 56: 104-110, 1942. The willow taken to be *Salix glauca* var. *glabrescens* in the above publication has since been proven to be Athabasca willow (*Salix athabascensis*). The firm-leaf willow (*Salix pseudocordata*) and caudate willow (*S. caudata*), both Cordilleran species, were found to occur in the Cypress Hills in 1947, and are additions to the Saskatchewan willow flora (See plates I and II).

## GENERIC CHARACTERS

Shrubs or sometimes trees, with alternate leaves and single-scaled winter buds. Flowers dioecious (bearing stamens and pistils on separate plants), in sessile to long-peduncled catkins, appearing before or with the leaves; sepals and petals absent; stamens mostly 2-8 behind each scale-like bract; fruit a one-celled capsule with numerous, small, hair-tufted seeds.

## KEY TO SPECIES OF SALIX

1. Leaves not hairy, or only slightly so when young.
2. Catkins appearing with the leaves; late flowering species.
3. Leaf-blades lanceolate to ovate, with ascending teeth; shrub not thicket-forming.
4. Stamens 3-8; bracts yellowish soon falling off.
5. Blades lanceolate to broadly lanceolate, acuminate, pale and glaucous beneath.
6. Leaves finely serrate, catkins loosely flowered; young twigs drooping ..... *S. amygdaloides*. Peach-leaved W.
6. Leaves serrulate, catkins densely flowered, twigs not drooping ..... *S. lasiandra*. Red W.
5. Blades narrowly lanceolate, long acuminate, green on both sides; Cypress Hills only ..... *S. caudata*. Caudate W.
6. Leaf-blades ovate-lanceolate, abruptly long acuminate, green and shining on both sides; margin with 6-10 (12-15) teeth per cm; flowering in May; capsules maturing in June ..... *S. lucida*. Shining W.

WILLOWS (*SALIX*) OF SASKATCHEWAN

TYPICAL LEAVES, ALL NATURAL SIZE

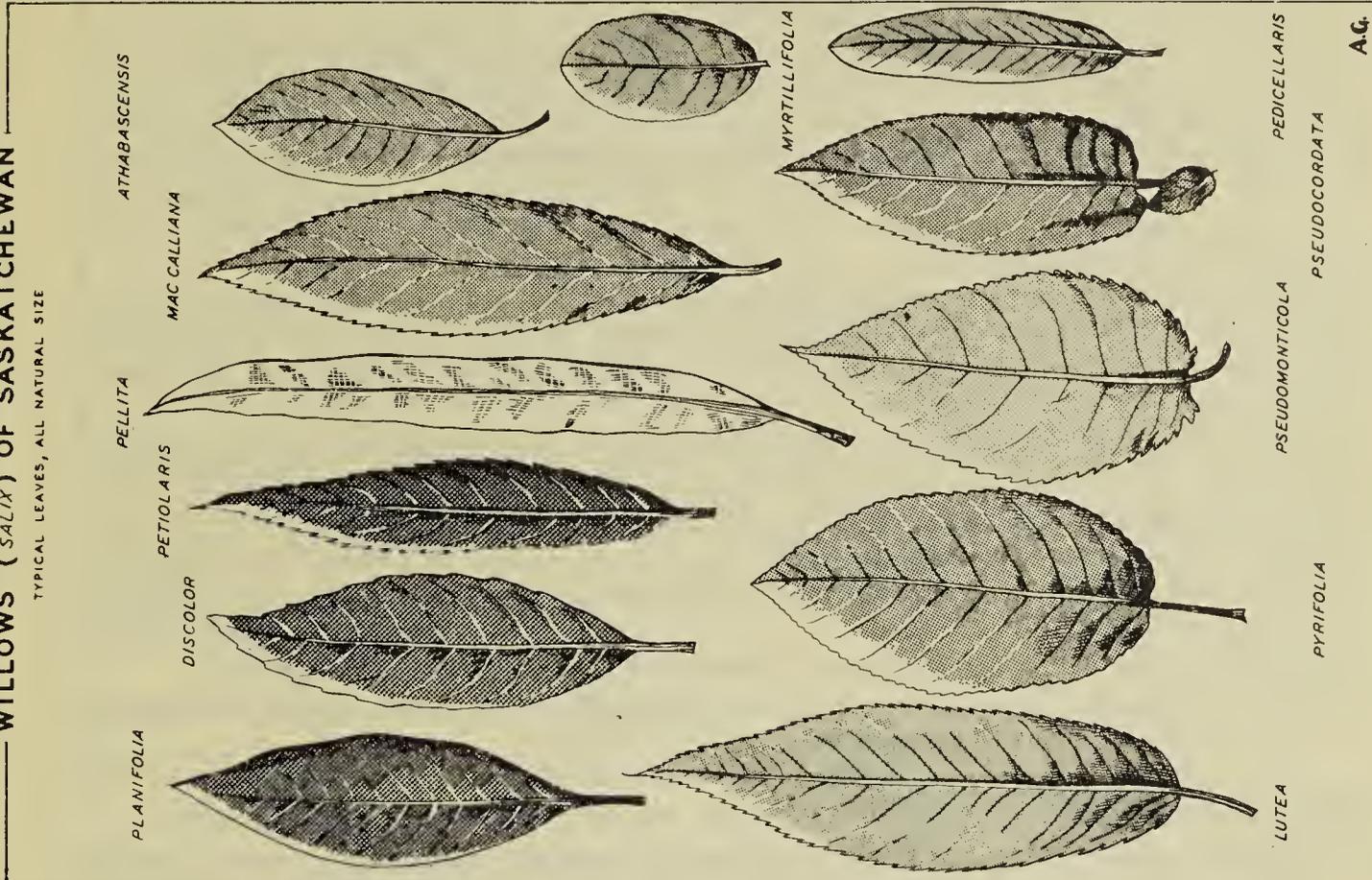


Plate II

WILLOWS (*SALIX*) OF SASKATCHEWAN

TYPICAL LEAVES, ALL NATURAL SIZE

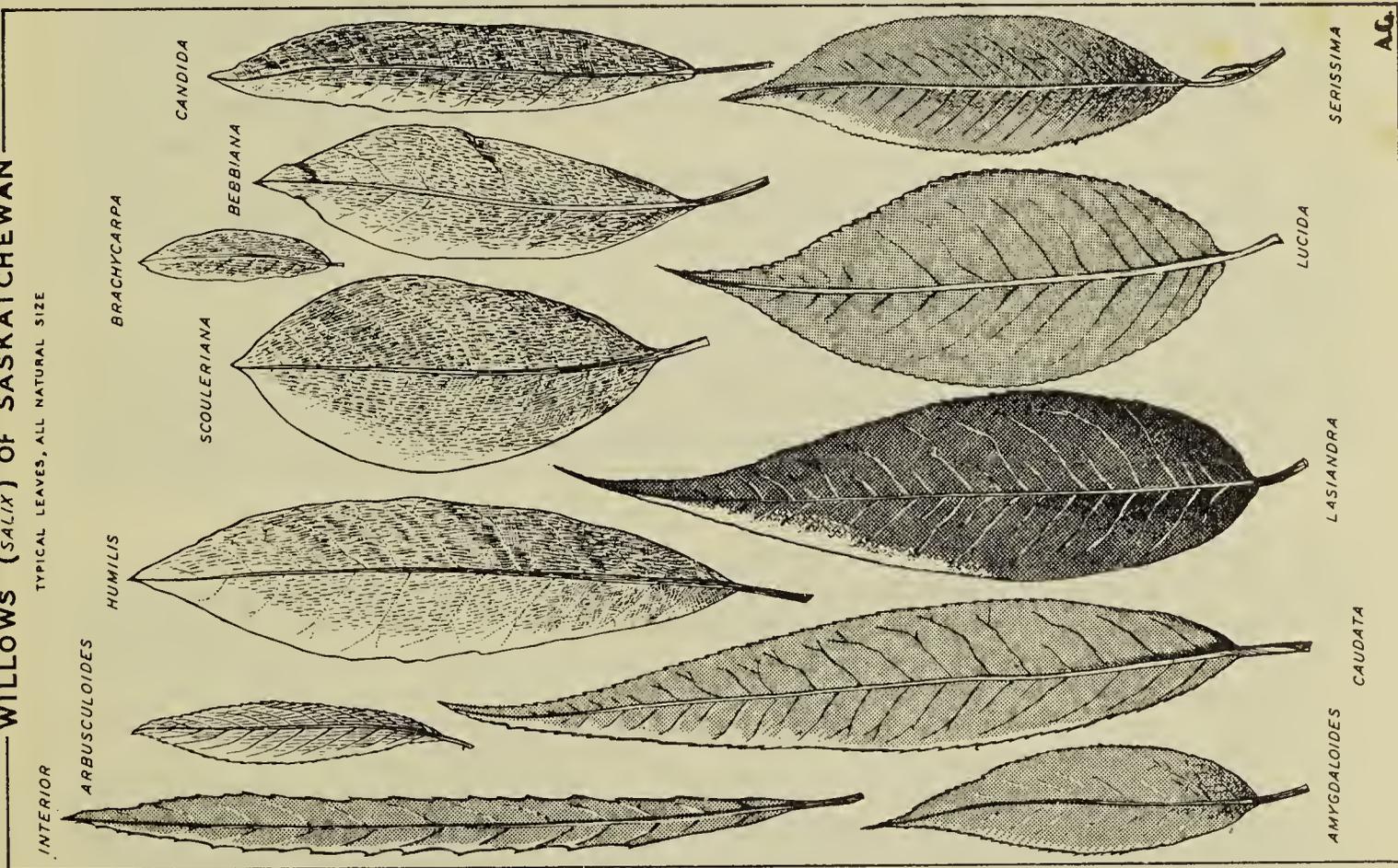


Plate I

6. Leaf-blades lanceolate, acute, glaucous beneath; margin with about 16 teeth per cm.; flowering in June; capsules maturing in late summer or autumn ..... *S. serissima*. Autumn W.
4. Stamens 2; bracts mostly brown to black, persistent.
5. Blades green on both sides.
6. Leaves thin, usually blackening in drying; shrub 4-24 inches, or rarely up to 6 feet high ..... *S. myrtillifolia*. Blueberry W.

6. Leaves thick, shrub 5-10 feet high.
7. Leaf-blades ovate-lanceolate, or obovate oval, glandular serrulate, light green; stipules present; capsules glabrous; Cypress Hills only .....  
..... *S. pseudocordata*. Firm-leaf W.
7. Leaf-blades finely serrulate, elliptic lanceolate or oblanceolate, dark green, stipules absent; capsules whitish hairy .....  
..... *S. MacCalliana*. McCalla's W.
5. Blades glaucous beneath.
6. Shrub 5-10 feet high; leaves finely serrate, cordate at the base; female catkins 2-3 inches long; pedicels 6-8 mm. long *S. pyrifolia*. Balsam W.
6. Shrub 2-3 feet high, leaves entire or nearly so, not cordate at the base, pedicels 3-5 mm. long.
7. Leaves obovate or elliptic, thin; branchlets and capsules hairy; spruce swamps ..... *S. athabascensis*. Athabasca W.
7. Leaves oblong, obtuse, thick; branchlets and capsules not hairy; bogs ..... *S. pedicellaris*. Bog W.
3. Leaf-blades linear with remote divergent teeth; stoloniferous, thicket forming shrub ..... *S. interior*. Sandbar W.
2. Catkins appearing before the leaves; early flowering species.
3. Blades elliptic-lanceolate or ovate lanceolate to oval; rather coarsely wavy-toothed, stipules present, large, leafy .....  
..... *S. pseudomonticola*. False-mountain W.
3. Blades lanceolate to elliptic; stipules absent, or when present, small.
4. Leaves lanceolate, shallowly toothed or entire, yellowish green; twigs yellow; old stems with diamond-shaped deformations, each resulting from a twig dying ..... *S. lutea*. Yellow W.; Diamond W.
4. Leaves narrowly lanceolate, sharply toothed, dark green; twigs reddish, slender, stems without diamond-shaped scars *S. petiolaris*. Basket W.
5. Shrub or small tree 9-18 feet high; leaves lanceolate to obovate or elliptic, irregularly crenate-serrate, stipules present on vigorous sprouts, pedicels 3-4 mm. long ..... *S. discolor*. Pussy W.
5. Shrub 6-9 feet high, branchlets maroon, leaves elliptic, pointed at both ends, entire or indistinctly toothed, stipules absent; capsules short-pedicelled ..... *S. planifolia*. Flat-leaved W.
1. Leaves hairy, even when mature.
2. Leaf blades hairy on both surfaces.
3. Leaves, twigs and capsules grey-hairy, female catkins .5 inch long; shrub 1-2 feet high; alkaline meadows *S. brachycarpa*. Short-capsuled W.
3. Leaves, twigs and capsules white wooly; female catkins 1-2 inches long; shrub 3-5 (8) feet high; swamps and bogs ..... *S. candida*. Hoary W.
2. Leaf-blades hairy beneath.
3. Blades elliptic, ovate to obovate.
4. Veins on the undersurface of the leaves prominent; margin sparsely serrate or entire, capsules long-pedicelled ..... *S. Bebbiana*. Bebb's W.
4. Veins on the undersurface of the leaves not prominent; capsules short-pedicelled.
5. Leaves oblanceolate to oblong, densely greyish, hairy beneath, wavy margined, shrub in sandy pine woods, Nipawin—eastward .....  
..... *S. Scouleriana*. Scouler's W.
5. Leaves ovate to obovate, silky beneath, entire; large shrub or small tree; Prince Albert-westward and Cypress Hills ... *S. Scouleriana*. Scouler's W.
3. Blades lanceolate.
4. Leaves lanceolate to linear-lanceolate, 3-6 inches long, entire, densely silvery-silky beneath; twigs often covered with a whitish bloom .....  
..... *S. pellita*. Satiny W.
4. Leaves narrowly lanceolate, 1.5-2 inches long, finely toothed, sparingly silvery-silky beneath; twigs maroon, without a bloom .....  
..... *S. arbusculoides*. Shrubby W.

## RENEW NOW

From the scientific point of view the logical end for research is publication. From publication comes education and then application. In the present day there is a need for hobbies, diversification and relaxation to relieve the tensions of a demanding world.

Every observation is a part of research and is of interest to others. To this end we urge all of you to join with us and help us by contributing your observations in order that common interests may be shared and by maintaining your membership in the Saskatchewan Natural History Society.

The BLUE JAY is rapidly making a name for itself as a well balanced Natural History publication. In this respect the Toronto Globe and Mail reports as follows: "We have no nature magazine in Canada covering a wider field of outdoor topics than the BLUE JAY or in a more interesting manner . . . it reaches and holds readers from eastern Ontario to the far northwest of Canada." We hope to continue to provide an exchange of ideas, the nuclei of hobbies, and a basic down to the earth education on conservation of all natural things.

WITH THE CURRENT ISSUE YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TO THE BLUE JAY EXPIRES unless otherwise indicated on the address label. However we are sure that your interest in the magazine has not lessened and we urge you to renew without delay. If you put it off you may forget.

We thank you heartily for your co-operation and are greatly appreciative of your past support.

Art Benson,  
on behalf of  
YOUR MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE.

### *We Need Your Continued Support*

We have prided ourselves with the idea that the last four issues of the BLUE JAY have been the best yet produced and were well worth the subscription fee of one dollar. In this respect we may possibly have been mistaken for there are over one hundred members who have neglected to pay for these issues.

We are a young organization afflicted with growing pains while endeavoring frantically both to do a good job to keep our head financially above the water. Frankly we cannot afford to give away a hundred subscriptions or more; neither can we afford or do we wish to lose these members. They are interested in nature or they would not have associated themselves with the Saskatchewan Natural History Society in the first place.

Since this is the last copy that we can send those members who still remain so far in arrears, we urge them strongly to stay with us, and to assist actively in building up that type of a nature magazine for amateurs which will meet the approval and hold the interest of all.

### *Examine Your Address Label*

Under your name and address will be found the date that your subscription has expired or will expire. To the majority of members this will be Dec. 31, 1951. If you belong to this group, your membership fee for 1952 is now due.

Will you please assist us by sending these in just as soon as possible, so that we can make adequate plans for the future.

AND THIS IS IMPORTANT; if for any reason you feel that you do not wish to have your subscription continued please notify the Secretary at once, so that we will have this information now rather than a year from now.

Should you require a receipt for a subscription renewal, will you please enclose return postage? All receipts are kept on file and are available to anyone at any time.

### *Gift Subscriptions*

Will members who have given the BLUE JAY during the past year, to schools or to private individuals, please advise us if we are to continue these subscriptions during 1952. If recipients of such gifts wish to continue on their own from now on, we will be glad also to hear from them.

WILLIAM ANAKA  
SPIRIT LAKE SASK

Dec. 1952

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The BLUE JAY is published quarterly at a yearly subscription rate of one dollar. Anyone interested in any phase of nature will be a welcome member of this organization. All subscriptions will start and terminate on the first day of January.

The deadline for the reception of material to be printed will be March 1, June 1, September 1 and November 20. All matter intended for publication in the BLUE JAY should be written as it is to appear in the magazine.

Mail all communications to the Editor at 1077 Garnet St., Regina.