

MAMMAL SECTION

SKUNKS AT PLAY

Elizabeth B.
Flock, Regina.



Seldom do city people have the opportunity to watch the playful antics of young wild animals. All too often, the first sight or scent of man send them scurrying in terror out of sight. So it was with pleasure that we welcomed the invitation of friends to visit a family of half-grown skunks they had seen playing the previous evening.

Their home was dug into the bank below the road level where tall grasses screened the entrance. From our vantage point just above them, we had a perfect view. Slightly before sunset one of the parents entered the den not to be seen again. About the same time two young emerged from a wheat field to cross the intervening grassy area leading home. They proceeded sedately in single file, their plumed tails waving gracefully.

All was quiet for a time until one emerged to follow a winding path down to the edge of a pool, the sole remnant of a stream that flowed under the bridge later to empty into Wascana creek. There he slaked his thirst with a long drink of water. Once when a forepaw went through the scum of plant life, he drew it out quickly to shake off the water. Shortly, a second one followed the exact course of the first to the same spot for a drink. A little later the third and smallest took the identical route of the others for his evening drink.

Thus revived, the two smaller skunks promptly engaged in a rough and tumble rollick like a couple of kittens. Soon one was on its back waving both front feet in the air. If one walked away the other sidled up and nipped it repeatedly for all the world like a small boy cuffing another into combat. Occasionally, they would sense something on the road in our direction and pause with heads thrown back to sniff the air while their tails went up at the same time. Reassured that all was well, they would tangle once more and roll about or work off their excess energy by digging frantically for a minute only to stop and turn to some fresh form of amusement. Meanwhile, cars passed back and forth each one shaking the bridge, but they were unheeded by the skunks while none of the passengers seemed sufficiently curious to see what was attracting our attention.

The third and largest skunk was less interested in play than the smaller ones, but much more interested in food. With nose close to the ground he was on the move in search of nourishment, around the pool, under the bridge, down to the former streambed, up again through the grass where only the white stripes on the back showed level with the grass tops. He worked farther and farther afield, stopping now and then to nab some grasshopper or other insect.

So we left them in the early darkness, one venturing alone into the world, the other two still rollicking together close to the home den until they, too, might feel the pangs of hunger sufficiently to go foraging.

COYOTES

Mrs. Carl Runyan reports that the coyotes played havoc among the lambs at Punnichy, this summer. The farmers there will be forced to give up turkey raising unless provision is made to confine the birds in wire pens.

At Grenfell, also, Mrs. John Hubbard reports that they are coming right into yards and picking up hens and chickens.

More reports of the extensive damage being done by coyotes have been received from different sections of the province. Marion Nixon makes the following observations of conditions in the Wauchope district.

"In this district we have no rabbits, practically no gophers, fewer ground-nesting songbirds than for years and there is hardly any comeback in grouse since the drop two years ago which was due to blizzards and floods.

At the same time, lamb losses and turkey losses were just as heavy while the small rodents were numerous. I do not believe in the rogue theory of coyote killers. Our experience teaches that coyote pups are given a course in lamb culture as part of their late summer training.

I have read many accounts that conclude that coyotes thrive on domestic environment, and seek to thrive on civilization. Surely, then, we are justified in combatting them.

JUMPING MICE

Mr. W. Yanchinski, is of the opinion that the Granlands Jumping Mouse is quite common in the Naicam district, particularly within close proximity to the water courses. He first saw one on May 27th and has since come upon three other individuals at different points.

CHIPMUNK

A Western Chipmunk has made his home in a woodpile near Mr. Yanchinski's house. Other individuals have been reported regularly at two other points in the Naicam district.

GROUND-HOG

Mrs. John Hubbard reports that ground-hogs are very plentiful in the Grenfell district this year. One moved into a stonepile beside her already ravaged garden, and after trying out peas, broccoli, cabbage, etc. ate one row of leaf lettuce and all of the head lettuce. Before he could finish the rest of the garden Mr. Hubbard intervened -- and the ground-hog appeared no more.

Any grasshoppers, Mrs. Hubbard?

BEAVER

"On my recent trip to Fishing Lakes and the Narrow Hills," writes Mr. C. Stuart Francis, "I could not help but observe the great increase in the beaver population. Twenty years ago, on a trip over the same road, only one colony of beaver could be found adjacent to the road and lakes; now every stretch, river, creek, muskeg, lake or slough has its colony. Beaver have cut down quite a number of Aspen Poplar right on the main beach at Fishing Lakes."

Speaking about beavers: have you read of the grain-eating variety that are adding to the worries of the farmer in the Moose Jaw district?

Game Warden Ted Smith reported that about 20 of these animals have been eating the crops just north of the village of Tilney. The animals have been chewing stems of Durham wheat on Mr. Strandlie's three-quarter section farm. The beavers nip off the wheat stems and carry the plants away to their homes near the banks of the Moose Jaw River. Hundreds of wheat straws have been found on the river banks. The animals had apparently eaten the wheat heads and left the straw.

A Moose Jaw district trapper was called to the rescue and trapped five of the flat-tailed animals. They were shipped to northern Saskatchewan. Another trapping expedition was planned to try to rid Mr. Strandlie of his wheat thieves. It is believed there are another fifteen beavers of the wheat-eating variety in the area.

....The Leader Post

Mrs. Marion Nixon tells that there has been a beaver lodge in a large slough, about three miles from Wauchope, the last three years.

"The slough is long and narrow rather than pothole in shape, and is so deep that horses driven home will try to ford it and find that they have to swim. There are several smaller sloughs close by, and the beavers have made ditches between whether to raise the level in their slough or to float logs, I do not know. Both explanations have been given me, but I have not watched construction proceedings myself. Where there had been a ditch it is now plugged.

A man drawing hay across, dug out the plug to drain off the water so his road would be better, and when he returned found it fast plugged again. I am told there are at least 14 beaver in the colony, both big and half grown. I have had no report of wee ones. This area is well posted with conservation signs."

TIMBER WOLVES

G.W. Carmichael, one of our subscribers from Eastern Canada, who now lives in Montreal, writes that he is very interested in the animal and bird stories of Saskatchewan. Some of the locations mentioned bring back to his mind many hunting and fishing trips during the years when he taught school in the Tisdale district.

"Last week," he writes, "while on a fishing trip north-east of Quebec City I coaxed my guide to paddle the canoe to within twenty-five feet of a bull moose, feeding in six feet of water. When he went down for lily roots he was completely submerged and stayed under for long periods. With horns in the velvet, he made a pretty sight and did not appear to be a bit concerned until we had approached to within a fly-cast. He then turned, waded out and stood in the fringe of the woods, watching us calmly."

BEARS

Damage caused by bears is increasing in the Endeavour district. Ed Hovey who resides seven miles west of the hamlet had his bee hives raided by a bear and lost all his honey as well as having the hives totally destroyed. In the same district John Tataryn lost a pig and placed another one in the barn for safety. The bear, however, forced his way in and ate the second porker. A bear, recently shot by Henry Beckman, measured ten feet in length.

Bears - big ones - created quite a furore in the Tisdale district during the last week in August.

Stephen Syniuk and Michael Klack, of Brooksby, saw a giant 700 pounder while they were stooking. It was crossing a field towards a pasture where Mike's eight-year-old brother was hunting cows. They jumped into their car and went to the house for the only weapons they owned - a shotgun and a pitchfork - returning hurriedly to get the bear and save the boy.

When they encountered the bear Mike took aim and got it right in the face, between the eyes. The bear charged and knocked Mike down. Steve grabbed the gun and got the bear in the shoulder. Then he was the object of the bear's attack. The pitchfork lost a tine in the back of the bear when Steve tried to get him off of Mike, only to be mauled nearly to the point of not being able to move.

The attack only tended to enrage the animal who chewed and boxed the men to the point of utter exhaustion. Steve, badly wounded and bleeding profusely wandered to the edge of the bush and collapsed. Mike, then remembered that he had heard a bear will leave a dead man alone so he lay as if dead and the bear went away. He was too far gone to fight any more anyway. Help finally came when neighbors heard the men's shouts a half a mile away. They were rushed to the Tisdale St. Theresa Hospital, suffering gashes and lacerations.

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On August 26, J. Greaves, of the Berlin district, heard a commotion in his pig-pen, late at night. He found his pig-pen partially torn down and heard his big sow squealing across the yard. He took the tractor for light and found the sow dying about 200 yards from the pen, where a bear had carried it, as there was no mark of a drag. He then called his neighbors at about 4.30 a.m. Saturday. They found the sow had been dragged further in, so they started a drive through the bluff around the house and about 9 o'clock drove out a huge black bear which fell to the aim of A. Abrahamson. The bear weighed about 500 pounds. About 35 men took part in the hunt and were served lunch by Mrs. Jack Greaves and Mrs. A. Rolles.

Also on Friday night, Mrs. N. Cooney and Ossie heard a big noise in their pig pasture just about dark and upon running down they came to a freshly killed pig. Seeing the others near the fence, they went to investigate, and suddenly came upon a big black bear. Mrs. Cooney ran back to the house for a rifle, leaving Ossie to try to drive the pigs to the pig-house armed only with a club of wood. When the bear ran in again and took a second pig, about 100 pounds weight, O. Cooney scared off the bear but the pig was torn quite a bit, but saved anyway. The next morning the Napoleon district hunters heard of the incident and as they were now organized and jubilant over their success they offered to join the hunters, which they did, and they soon found track of the bear in H. Woolsey's pasture. About 40 men were now in the chase, which continued all day, but the bear eluded them along the river and swamp.

On Sunday morning early Mr. and Mrs. N. Cooney went to look at their field of barley about half a mile from the house and saw four bears come out of the grain into a bluff on the east side. Leaving the men on guard, Mrs. Cooney drove back to the house and put in several calls to the hunters of the previous day. By noon they were again gathered at the home of Mrs. A. Salm and took up the chase across the old Godson farm. Two more wolves got in the

way and lost their lives, but about 4.30 p.m. they flushed a mother bear and two cubs which were killed just off the road east of Jack Nickols'.

The big bear was killed by N. Cooney, who broke its back, and D. Crawford finished it. One small bear fell to Alwin Gay, who had also killed one of the wolves. The third bear fell to D. Crawford.

---Saskatoon Star-Phoenix

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FISH, AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

CATFISH AND OTHERS

According to Mr. Francis, fish appear to be more plentiful than usual this season in the Torch River. His son, Stanley, age 13, has caught pike, pickerel and suckers on trolling hooks. It was unusual to get suckers on a hook. However, he was unable to land a catfish, which was also eyeing his bait.

SALAMANDER

An unusual specimen was found on August 14, at York Lake, by Miss Betty Marshal of Yorkton. Mr. Clifford Shaw sent it to the Manitoba museum for identification. Following is the reply from L.T.S. Norris-Elye, the director:

"Your specimen arrived in good condition (apart from the missing stern). It is the larval stage of the Devil's Lake Salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum diabolii*). When I first saw it I thought it was *Necturus*, possibly the first authentic specimen for the Province.

You may be rather surprised at the size of this larval form, as I was some years ago; it is quite common for these salamanders to metamorphose completely at two-thirds this size and for the larval forms to almost equal in size those of the largest adults.

If you have any friends in the country South and South-east of Saskatoon, it would be worth while to get them to look out for *Ambystoma jeffersonianum*, as Dr. Rawson of the Zoology Department of the University wrote Mrs. Priestly years ago that he knew of several such records. This is very surprising, as in Manitoba its range seems to be confined to the extreme South-east part of the Province.

TOAD

We wonder how many of our readers are acquainted with the Western Spadefoot Toad. Mr. Fred Bard, Director of the provincial museum, found a specimen this summer at Big Muddy Lake and brought it to the museum.

It is a small toad, about two inches in length. The eyes are large and prominent and the pupil of the eye forms a vertical rather than a horizontal slit. Another distinguishing characteristic is a black spur on the hind foot. The toad is brown in color with four light-coloured stripes from head to thighs. Small warts on the upper surfaces are dark brown.