

FUR NOT FEATHERS

Woodchuck. We continue to hear of Woodchucks (the Groundhog) becoming more abundant in southern sections of the province. A pair of these animals took up residence last summer in a field on the farm of Fred Harris, a few miles south of Yorkton. The burrow was in a small rise and they were frequently seen by passers-by from the highway. Mr. Harris decided however, that they might prove undesirable neighbors and accordingly shot them. The bad point about Woodchucks, from the farmer's point of view, is that their holes, and the mounds of earth which they excavate, are obstructions to cultivation and harvest operations. A.J. Breitung was telling us that at Tisdale, Woodchucks have become such a serious pest in recent years that the Rural Municipality offers a bounty of five cents for each animal and that in 1943 this bounty was paid on no less than 1092 Woodchucks.

Long-tailed Weasel. When the weasels turned color this Fall, the absence of snow made them a most conspicuous feature around the countryside. On Oct. 27 Mrs. Priestly watched one in almost immaculate white gambolling on the road alongside York Lake, apparently enjoying the unusually warm and summer-like weather as much as the observer was! As previously noted in the "Blue Jay", H.H. Pittman, Wauchope, had an article on the Long-tailed Weasel in the June-July issue of Nature Magazine (U.S. publication), which was illustrated by photographs taken by the author. Mr. Pittman is of the opinion that "Weasels are among the most graceful and courageous of our small animals, and go through life with an independence and singleness of purpose which is really admirable." While he agrees that the destruction of poultry by weasels is "deplorable", he points out that at the same time, "we must admit that their effect on the ground-squirrel population is of great importance."

An example of the fierce courage of the weasel was cited by H.S. Swallow, President of the Yorkton Fish & Game League, in his column in the "Yorkton Enterprise" - "I was told by W. Swanson of Theodore that while he was discing last summer, he could see a weasel which would dart in and out among the plants but which did not leave the vicinity. Gradually the disc came nearer and nearer to the small patch that was apparently the home of the small creature. When at last the time came to disc this piece, to Mr. Swanson's surprise the weasel attacked the rubber wheels of the tractor with the utmost ferocity, squealing and jumping at the huge mass of rubber with wide open mouth. It was an amazing exhibition of courage when the size of the tractor wheels in comparison with the size of the weasel is taken into consideration."

Lynx. It is not often the Lynx wanders out of its natural habitat in the northern woods, but this Fall we heard of two being killed in the settled areas further south. In September, L.B. Larson of Yorkton ran over one with his car near Balcarres and in October a very large specimen was shot with a 12 gauge shot gun by Bert Hipsley at his home east of Yorkton. When discovered about four o'clock in the afternoon this animal took to a tree, which is something which the Lynx apparently does only when cornered. The Lynx is a member of the cat family and lives mainly on rabbits. The relationship between rabbits and lynx has long been known and the saying "No rabbits, few lynx" is an old slogan of the northwoods trappers.

Badger. We are not in favor of the year-round open season on Badgers. Badgers are reported to have increased in numbers in many places in the southern part of the province. While we agree that any poultry-slaying badger must pay the penalty, we do not think it desirable that these animals should be indiscriminately killed when they occur in the wilder places. In the British Isles the Badger has been practically exterminated and now efforts are being made to preserve it as an interesting feature of the original fauna of Britain. We in Canada should do well to consider this point - if the Badger has a place in the crowded islands of Britain surely we can afford to keep him on our vast western plains!