

FUR NOT FEATHERS

Muskrat Owing to the fact that considerable snow followed closely upon freeze-up last fall, the younger members of the Yorkton group were unable to make the annual count of the muskrat houses on the two Rousay Lakes on skates. However, W.A. Brownlee covered most of the area by car and on foot and got the surprising count of 850 houses on the Upper Lake and 350 on the Lower, making a total of 1,200 houses. Even so, he feels that this is a conservative estimate as there were certain portions of the Lower Lake that he did not reach, so the actual figure may be nearer 2,000 houses. The Rousay Lakes were re-flooded by Ducks Unlimited in the spring of 1943 and the count in December, 1943, was 169 houses on the Upper Lake and 25 on the Lower. In 1944, the count was 353 houses on the Upper Lake and 223 on the Lower. These figures are of particular interest showing what can be achieved through water restoration and also in view of the fact the muskrat population is reported to be at a very low level in most of southern Saskatchewan.

Pocket Gopher Our "friend" the Pocket Gopher is so rarely seen above ground that the following item from Jim White of Fort San is quite an unusual observation. When ploughing early last season he turned up a young Pocket Gopher, about half grown. "I put him in a slight hole I kicked in the soft earth," wrote Mr. White, "and he immediately gave me a digging demonstration. With fore and hind feet going like mad, he was out of sight in a few minutes. The dirt began to fall in behind him, so out he came pushing the earth up the slope with nose and front paws. Then down again to throw out more earth behind him and then he again became a tiny bulldozer as he cleared it away. It was a most interesting performance and I wished I had someone with me to see it."

Silver-haired Bat An extremely late date for a bat was recorded by H.M. Raynor, Ituna. On October 3 he was working in a tool shed in his garden when he heard a rustling noise in a pail suspended from the roof. Thinking a mouse was imprisoned in the pail, he took it down, and to his surprise found, "not a mouse but a beautiful Silver-haired Bat, its fur almost like that of a silver fox." Mr. Raynor tipped the bucket on the ground, and the bat immediately flew off.
(Note: The Silver-haired Bat is one of the migratory, rather than hibernating species of bats, so this is a most interesting record.)

Richardson's Ground Squirrel The common "gopher" or "flickertail". One of these animals was seen playing in the sunshine on the bank of a creek at Springside, near Yorkton, on January 6 - perhaps he was trying to emulate the ground-hog! Last winter Mrs. Marion Nixon reported in her column, "Nature", in the Saskatchewan Farmer, that "a gopher was forked out of a load of hay in a loft at Tyvan, curled up tight in a frozen ball." Have any members come across a similar instance of a gopher trying to hibernate in a stack? When animals hibernate, it is not merely a case of "Going to sleep for the winter", their body processes, such as respiration and temperature, slow down to such a low point that a hibernating animal actually is, "stiff with cold".

FUR NOT FEATHERS (continued)

Rabbits Rabbits seem essentially such peaceable creatures, but apparently naturalists can get into quite heated arguments over them! Last spring the first visit to the Wildlife Sanctuary of the Regina Natural History Society was made by a party of six members--strictly "stag". On returning home these gentlemen told of having seen a "rabbit dance" on the hills. To say their story was received with reservations, is putting it rather mildly, but here is the account of the incident as given in an article in the Regina Leader Post by R.C. Mackenzie:

"A dozen rabbits were playing some sort of game on the hill above us. Almost a kind of dance. Using powerful binoculars we watched this closely. Rabbits were running in a circle, darting from side to side, jumping over each other, chasing one another, and occasionally getting into a fight and letting fly a mighty kick with strong hind feet. The dance seemed confined to an area of about thirty feet in diameter, bounded by a ring of large stones. I think this might be much the same ceremony as the winter dances which leave such intricate track patterns in the snow. However, this was the first time that I have seen it done at this season, and for those who doubt that such things take place at all, this time there was no lack of witnesses."

And Dick Bird wrote us - "On July 11, while scouting a sand bar jutting out into the lake at Liberty I flushed a jack rabbit--without hesitation the jack plunged into the water and swam across the channel to the mainland about 100 feet away . . . a happy sight and interesting to me . . . a few years ago on a radio program I spoke of rabbits swimming, and several listeners commented that it was not the rabbit that was "all wet". I have seen this happen twice before, but this time I had witnesses."

(Note: Mrs. Nixon once mentioned having seen a common Meadow Mouse swim across a creek despite a strong current, and that periodically it swam underwater. We have also read that porcupines can swim across a stream, and were under the impression that all animals could swim. Editor)

Porcupines As has been stated before in the "Blue Jay", porcupines seem far more commonly distributed throughout the province than is generally believed. According to Mrs. Elizabeth Flock, the Regina Natural History Society has come across them in the Wascona valley comparatively close to human habitations. One of our younger members, Joseph Nouch, Sandwith, describes seeing his first live porcupine in January, 1945 - "I was following my trapline when I heard my dog barking near a bush. Thinking it was a squirrel I ran over. It was snowing at the time and when I saw this big ball ^{LIKE} of hay I thought it was a squirrel's nest and gave it a poke, and was I surprised when it turned around! I might mention that there were many trees - poplars and willows, at that spot which had been stripped of their bark, so he must have been there some time."

Miss Joan Rudachyk, Insinger, sent us some quills and hair from a porcupine which had been killed at Sheho. We forwarded these to Dr. R.M. Anderson of the National Museum of Canada, Ottawa, who has been studying the Canadian porcupine for 30 years. He stated that this Sheho specimen was the yellow-haired form and that it was their first record from that region of Sask. Some time ago we asked for porcupine quills, but if possible some of the long hairs should also be sent, as Dr. Anderson states that "the quills, as far as can be ascertained, seem the same for all the races."