

"O Wonder Dog of the West! O Song Dog
Of the Dawning! more than any other creature
The symbol of the medicine-making West!
How I wish I could do justice to your spirit,
To your meaning - to your way of life
If I could only voice the fierce sad joy
That you engender in me."

-- Ernest Thompson Seton



THE COYOTE

By Kerry Wood, Red Deer, Alta.

I have been fighting the coyote drives in a one-man campaign in this province, using radio and magazine articles to express my views. If the drives were confined to coyotes and magpies only, we wouldn't mind too much --- though most naturalists have been trying to convince farmers for years that coyotes are more beneficial than destructive, because of their interest in rodent pests. But such community hunts have degenerated into "shooting-everything" mob hunts, with game birds, insectivorous birds, and such good mousers as the Short-eared Owls all being blasted. In my home community, two doe deer were killed on one drive. I'm happy to report that more and more of the better farmers are awakening to the mob dangers of such drives, and "No Shooting" signs are now in great demand in our district -- so the hunters are actually hurting their own interests by continuing the coyote drives.

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In the January number of the "Farm and Ranch Review," published in Calgary, there is an article by Kerry Wood, under the title, "Organized Wildlife Slaughter disguised as 'coyote hunts'". We will quote just a few paragraphs in which he has enlarged on the ideas contained in his letter.

"The fall and winter of 1949-50 may be long remembered as the inauguration of Community Hunts in Western Canada. Coyote drives apparently originated in Central Alberta this season, but rapidly spread to all parts of the West.

The hunts were first organized by farmers, angry about losses of chickens, turkeys and sheep. But very soon the sportsmen took over, co-operating closely with the farmers regarding hunt locations The sport has proven immensely popular, with indications that Community Coyote Drives will continue all winter long throughout Western Canada.

I find myself a lone minority, in my opposition to coyote drives. There has been many infractions of the game laws on almost every hunt. Hungarian Partridges, Prairie Chicken, and Ruffed Grouse fly ahead of the advancing line of shooters; when these birds finally try to fly back over the men, many shooters knock down the game birds - even though the open season has been closed for some time.

And that isn't all. Some shooters have a tendency to line their sights on anything that flies - valuable weed-seed and insectivorous birds like Pine Grosbeaks, Snow Buntings, Woodpeckers of various kinds, and even the friendly little chickadees. Hence a nasty trail of blood has been left behind some shooters taking part in coyote drives.

.....Therefore I am strongly opposed to Coyote drives. Oh, I know that farmers have suffered some serious losses as a result of coyote depredations, and am aware that most Western Canadian game branches have stopped

paying bounty on coyotes. The bounty system has proved a waste of money -- but there are too many harmful elements, to condone these community drives against Don Coyote. Too many valuable birds and animals are killed, in violation of both game laws and Migratory Bird laws. In addition there is an unsporty stigma about such drives -- the trapped helplessness of the wild creatures, fleeing ahead of the advancing hunters, unable to win their way out of the encircling trap. And there is an unsporty element about such hunts that is part and parcel of the old mob violence we should abhor.

A final word should be said on behalf of the coyotes. The reason these animals are so plentiful throughout North America today is because their natural food animals (mice, ground squirrels, gophers and rats) are enormously abundant, thriving as result of agricultural development. While coyotes do bother our poultry, sheep and feeble calves, the majority of these wild dogs honestly earn their food from the pest rodents so harmful to man's economic interests. Government naturalists who have made stomach analysis studies of coyotes over a period of years report that coyotes do valuable work in controlling more serious farm pests, more than making up for their own evil doings.

IT LIVES BY ITS WITS

By Ed Wiley, Saltcoats.

This is a true story of the first wolf hunt by plane I have ever witnessed -- and the coyote won a smashing victory. I have no idea of the identity of the plane or its occupants.

It was February 10th and the day was clear and calm with about two inches of fresh snow on the old banks. We noticed an aeroplane circling over our neighbor's field as if to land, and then circled again. It floated gracefully over the road and fences -- put its skis down and taxied crazily across the open pasture. It was then we realized a coyote chase was in progress. The coyote refused to run straight but took a tantalizing zig-zag course, and had the hunter shooting on zig when he should have been on zag.

Our wily coyote ducked under a fence and again the plane took to the air, circled, and discovered that the coyote had reached the bottom of the marsh -- down, down came the plane, and again Mr. Cunning ran at right angles. Scarcely were the skis above the rushes when we heard the loud report of a shot gun. Once more the craft went up and made a wide turn, and as it landed, Mr. Coyote again eluded the pursuers - crossed a small field and hid in a poplar grove. The birdmen landed right beside him but coasted just a little too far. Quick to take advantage of the error, the coyote cut across right behind the plane and reached some light scrub, covered by a long snowbank. The hunters turned and followed in hot pursuit, but their intended victim followed the snowbank, where the running was ideal for him but difficult for the plane. Eventually the animal reached an acre field of willows and there he stayed. Around and around went the plane -- then back and forth over the top -- but it was of no use -- it gave up; then disappeared like a great bird of prey into the northwest.

We saddled the pony, rode out, and followed the chase from start to finish. The story was plainly written in the fresh snow. We found Mr. Coyote still hiding, and once again he took care that nothing was going to harm his beautiful hide.

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WANTED: Contributions from our subscribers interested in archaeology. We would like this section to be a regular feature of the BLUE JAY.

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SIGHT VERSUS SCENT By Doug Gilroy, RR 2, Regina.

To my mind there is no doubt that a deer can stand the sight of man better than he can his scent. I have had this proven to me on two different occasions.

One bright hoar-frosty morning, I was hiking up the creek to see what I could find among the wonders of nature. What a glorious morning it was! The bright sun made the frost and snow sparkle and gleam like a great array of jewels. After walking on the ice of the creek for some distance, I climbed up the bank to cut across a flat. There in front of me, at a distance of about 200 yards, in some low bushes, was a herd of six white-tailed deer. I was out in plain sight but remained perfectly still and took a good look at them with my telescope. A pair of them would rear up on their hind legs and box at each other with their fore-hoofs. They were just in front of me in a straight northerly direction. There was a light wind blowing from the east.

One of the deer spied me, but instead of running away, came towards me, walking very slowly and staring as hard as it could stare. As it drew nearer it also began to circle to my left or in the direction of the wind. On he came, very slowly, in a semi-circle and still staring. Soon he was almost straight west of me, then with a couple of more steps he was in the direct path of the wind that was blowing from me to him. As soon as he caught my scent he jumped as if he were shot and, with several loud snorts, went bounding away as hard as he could go, followed by the other five.

On another occasion I was walking east on a road with a breeze blowing from the southeast. What should I see but a "White-tail" coming over a rise in the trail and travelling straight towards me. I crouched down in my tracks about the same time as he saw me. He did not run but took a good look, and then began to circle around towards the northwest. His progress was slow until he reached the spot where the wind was blowing from me to him, then, wham! -- what snorting and jumping he did as he left the vicinity.

So it only goes to show that a deer can stand the sight of a man better than his scent -- and for this reason: his sense of sight is not nearly as great as his sense of smell, and furthermore, the deer know it. They knew what they were doing when they circled around to get in line with the wind. It is his nose which really tells what is there.

HIBERNATING BATS

Stuart Jordon, of Regina, who now is attending the University at Saskatoon, has this evidence to offer.

"While I was teaching at Moose Jaw, at Ross School, I often, with the help of a couple of the boys, would capture a bat by scaling a ladder and then grasp the little "winged mouse" (as the pupils called him) by the neck. If the capture was made in the winter months, I had little difficulty as they seemed semi-stuporous. If the capture was made close to spring, they were much more active and were caught only after considerable effort. I identified this bat as the Little Brown Bat. A large number must have occupied the school the year around, for they were always being discovered, particularly in increasing numbers as spring drew near. I found a half-dozen or more skeletons in an old screened-in air vent.

From all the observations I have made, I feel positive that bats do winter over in Saskatchewan.

BADGER VS SKUNK

(Thinking that this interesting story was signed, we destroyed the accompanying letter and later realized that we had also lost the name of the writer. Will the author please pardon our mistake, and set us right so that his name will be acknowledged in our next issue. Ed.)

We saw something on the way back just south of Cardston that, although I have read about it several times in outdoor magazines, I never expected to see. In fact, very few people indeed have ever seen it. And that is a fight to the death between a badger and a skunk.

We noticed the commotion in the ditch just as we drove past, so I slowed down and pulled in to the side, stayed in the car, and watched through the back window. It was really something, and I didn't know that either of these animals had such long, sharp teeth as they certainly have. We were only 20 or 30 feet from them. It was marvellous the way the badger always kept in front of the skunk when the latter tried to turn his back on him. Then the badger would hit out quickly with his paw and knock the skunk down, and then would try to roll him on his back to get at his throat.

The skunk sure put up a fight - at one time he grabbed the badger by one of his front paws and afterwards I noticed the badger was crippled in that foot, and finished the fight on three legs. Anyway, after about twenty minutes, the badger grabbed the skunk in the back, right over his loins, shook him and then dropped him. That was the end of the skunk, because when the badger saw that it couldn't walk away without dragging its back legs, he just tore in, turned him over on his back, and chewed away at his throat. Very soon the skunk's legs quivered and stretched out stiff -- and that was that.

The badger looked around then and noticed the car, so he ran off about ten yards and stood looking us over. However we kept perfectly still and he then went back to the skunk again, picked him up in his mouth, and started across the road with him. At this stage, I opened the car door and let out a yell. Dropping it in a hurry, he ran over into the field where he stood, watching the car.

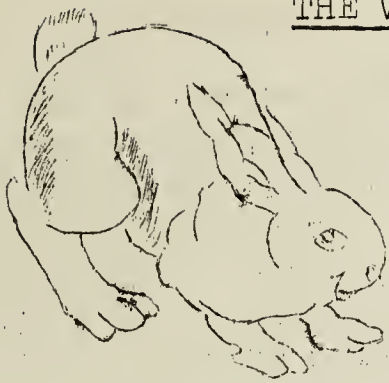
I didn't bother him any more, and we drove on down the road, so I suppose he went right back and got his victim. I'll bet a full-grown badger would make a mess of any dog that tackled him, from the way this one handled that skunk. As I said, very few people have ever seen this kind of performance, and even naturalists have spent a lifetime in the open and have never seen it, although it is generally believed that they do just what we saw. It's too bad we didn't have one of those small movie machines to take a picture of the whole thing.

PIGS DO IT TOO

By Wm. Dube, Benson.

On October 1, 13 pigs had left the farmyard and were crossing into a field to feed. They came across a skunk, who challenged them. This threat made no difference to the pigs. They simply walked right on into the fight, killed the skunk and ate it.

The skunk threw scent on them several times, but it had no effect on the pigs. The odor was carried to the farm and annoyed the dog who barked all night - believing skunks were about. The odor remained several days.

THE VARYING HARE AND THE CYCLE OF DEATH

There are many wonderful things in nature that we take for granted, but one that has recently caused considerable comment is the periodic rise and fall in the population of certain of our western animals such as the "Bush Rabbit," grouse and prairie chickens. Up until recently very little has been done about this, but now through scientific research, an attempt has been made to solve the mystery.

Prof. William Rowan, head of the zoological department at the University of Alberta, believes that a deficiency in the ultra-violet vitamin "D" rays of the sun may be the reason why populations of many bird and animal species appear to vary in 10-year cycles.

One group of rabbits is to get a vitamin "D" deficiency diet, the other an extra-vitamin "D" diet. The professor hopes to induce a premature "crash" in the numbers of the group on the deficiency diet.

The last peak in the rabbit population of Western Canada was reached in 1942. By 1944, hardly any rabbits were to be found. Prof. Rowan predicts that in 1952, the expected peak in the next cycle, there will be again some 100,000,000 rabbits in Alberta. He has given no estimate for Saskatchewan. By 1954 he believes it will be again difficult to find many rabbits in the West.

Every ten years the numbers of grouse, pheasants, prairie chickens and partridges also have reached peaks, only to disappear suddenly.

Study in Edmonton and Switzerland indicate the ozone in the upper atmosphere, which filters the sun's ultra-violet rays, undergoes a cycle of its own. Canadian animals and possibly human beings are affected by the cycle of death because in northern latitudes the sun's rays are too weak throughout most of the year to be of benefit. Thus, if some disturbance shuts the rays off during the short northern summer, animals quickly develop a vitamin "D" deficiency. In their weakened condition, they are prey to many diseases and die off in millions.

And here is another remarkable fact. Prof. Rowan's work indicates Canadians may be affected in the same manner. German measles, mumps and whooping cough all appear to follow a similar cycle. In 1934-35, when the rabbit population was nearly wiped out, all these diseases showed a striking increase.

(Adapted from an article appearing in the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, January 20.)

PORCUPINES

In the last issue, Mr. Yaki asked about a porcupine occupying a broken tree and wonders if it is his home. "In my opinion," writes Mr. Doug Gilroy, "I would say it was only his home for the time being. I have seen Porky stay in one spot, like that, for quite some time and then move on. His real home, I believe, would be in his den in the ground."

STRIPED GOPHERS

Mark R. Kilcher, Superintendent, Experimental Farm Service, Swift Current, writes:

"I thought it might be of interest to the readers of the BLUE JAY to note the seemingly odd occurrence of Striped Gophers as far west and south as Swift Current. On two occasions I saw one in a sandhill area a few miles west of the city. Mr. A.C. Budd tells me he has not seen or heard of the Striped Gopher being seen in this area before, and he has lived here for 35 years."