

Never Reward Youth for the Destruction of Wildlife

By H. M. Rayner, Ituna

I must first make clear to readers that I write of a relatively small area. I rarely travel farther from home than my legs will take me, which is not more than five or six miles. The typical park-belt country that environs the village of Ituna (about 50 miles west of the city of Yorkton) has been my habitat for the past 45 years. During that time, the topography of the district has changed almost beyond recognition. Many factors, some due to variations of climate and weather, some to land settlement and the activities of man, have affected wild life. To this subject I trust to return in later letters.

The number of coyotes, crows and magpies is a serious threat to the recovery of upland gamebirds from a low point in the population cycle. Only 20 years ago, a magpie was an unusual sight. Forty years ago, I welcomed it as a rarity. Now, in the course of a mile or two of walking, I seldom fail to see two or more magpies. Once last summer I saw 14 in one flock.

While following the railway track one day, I noticed a pair of magpies on the ground in the bed of a dry pot-hole surrounded on three sides by dense thickets of willow and poplar, but open to view from where I stood. They had not spotted me, so I sat down on the railway bank to watch them through my binoculars.

Clearly, a courtship was going on. The magpies played hide and seek among the willows, slipping out of sight and in again, appearing and disappearing. The male began a sort of

dance or parade before the female, who stood perfectly still, facing him. With wings half spread and drooping, like a killdeer plover putting on a 'wounded' act, the male magpie pranced and cavorted about for his lady's benefit. Perhaps she got bored with the whole show; perhaps they had become aware of my presence, and suspected that it boded them no good. She turned suddenly and vanished into the bush. The male followed, and I saw no more of them that day.

I want to go on record as approving strongly the present trend to employ trained and experienced hunters to trap and shoot when it becomes necessary to reduce, or try to reduce, the numbers of a given species. I want to repeat what I have said before, that I unequivocally condemn the giving of treats and prizes to children for killing crows or magpies, or for destroying eggs, nests, and young. Such a program of control defeats its own purpose. We must foster among our young people interest and love for ALL wild life, and ought never to reward them for destroying it. How, after that, can we expect our teachers to ask children to appreciate Robert Burns, whose heart was so full of love for all living and lifeless things, to whom a mouse was a " poor earth-born companion, and fellow mortal ?"

Instead of enlisting the children, governments and interested organizations must see to it that the resources of science, skill, and experience are called in to do what killing is necessary in the most expeditious, efficient and humane manner possible.

Mr. T. Martinovsky, 1907 Walnut Rd., R. R. 5, New Westminster, B. C. would like to get in touch with someone who is willing to sell his BLUE JAY copies for the year 1943.