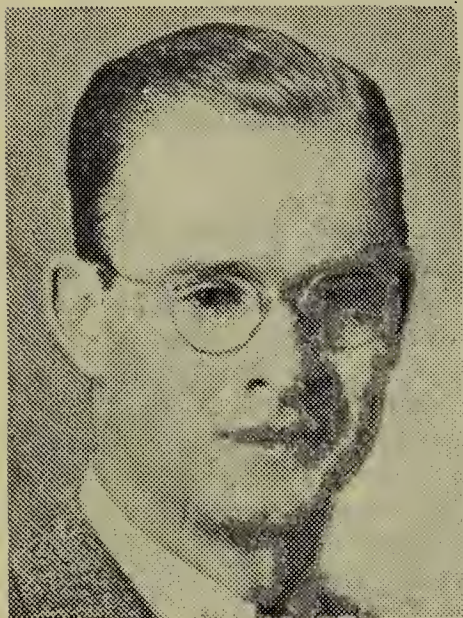


The Blue Herons of Qu'Appelle Valley

Doug Gilroy — Pres. S.N.H.S.



Every year in a naturalist's life there seems to be one special day that stands out above all the other days of the year. The "Special" day for me this year, occurred in the lovely month of June - the day we searched for the nesting colony of the Great Blue Herons.

Last winter a friend told me such a colony existed, and to him I am very grateful. I'll never forget that "Special" day. All the wild things we saw while searching for the herony seemed to have an extra attraction and beauty. Never did I see the sky a nicer blue, and the Qu'Appelle, never so much a technicolor green.

As we walked through the meadows Bobolinks and Redwing Blackbirds would fly up from the grass in front of us. Once, as we passed through a popular wood, we flushed a family of Ruffed Grouse. The young instantly hid in the heavy vegetation and the parent bird was

very excited and would "putt, putt" from tree to tree. once she lit on a branch only two feet above my head.

On further we found the prettiest little slough you could ever wish to see. It was completely surrounded with poplars and graceful willow trees. Its blue surface was studded with gold - the blossoms of Bladderwort. Then to make the picture complete, two wild ducks and their day old young swam out across it. On seeing us the mother quacked loudly and put on the "broken wing" act, splashing up the water in glittering sprays.

On we went again and shortly we saw a lone Heron flying high over our heads. Watching with field glasses we saw it land in a grove of tall maple trees along the river. Our pulse beat faster as we realized our goal might be in sight. We advanced quietly. No herons could be seen but as we drew nearer to the maples we began to hear a lot of odd gabbling and hoarse croaks.

Suddenly out of the tree tops burst two great birds! There before us was the first heron colony I had ever seen. What a Thrill! It was not as large a colony of some I have read of, as it contained only from 15 to 20 nests. From the ground the nests didn't look so big, but when taking colour pictures of the young, which always retreated to the far edge of the nest, the range finder registered six feet.

The nests were made of big slender sticks, loosely yet fairly substantially put together - high in the tree tops. Accidents do happen. One nest was tipped over and the young were spilled to the ground below. Each nest, we were able to look into, had four young about one-quarter to one-half grown. Under one nest we found some newly hatched egg shells. They are blue in color.

A herony is not a place of silence. the young are continually gabbling away among themselves and the old folks gossip back and forth.

One moment there wouldn't be a Heron in sight in the sky, then suddenly one would come zooming in from nowhere. What a racket there would be then! The young ones would "holler" at the tops of their voices, for they know mother or dad was returning from a trip to market with good things to eat. Just before the parent would land at the nest, it too, would let out a loud squawk which probably meant: "Get out of the way - stand back."



(continued on page 31)

located a cardboard box and placing the bird inside began to look about for some string to tie it shut. Seeing none, I decided to turn the box upside down. In doing so the bottom fell out and only narrowly did I escape getting struck in the eye by its sharp beak before recapturing it. Just then the farmer returned home and after showing him the bird, remarked, "You did well to get that fellow, must be the one that's getting my chickens". Swallowing hard, I explained that this was a Heron, not a Hawk. Arriving back in town I dropped the bird, still in the box, at the office. Returning a few moments later, I was surprised to see every available article, including a chair, atop the box. It seems that a Bittern, more feathers than flesh, can escape through any opening that will allow the neck and one leg to be thrust through. The bird was released wearing a band at a suitable slough.

From my kitchen window I have a string running to an ordinary drop-trap, 3 feet by 4 feet and 7 inches deep. This was one of my first traps. Having been used for several years, it caught over 2500 birds, it lacked a few repairs. Accidentally, one day

during my absence, it was tripped and remained so until my return that evening. My wife questioned me then, as to why I had left two birds in it. I said I hadn't. Then she explained she had released them. Examining the trap I found two small birds still in it. Being more puzzled, I noticed a small hole near the center of the trap, barely an inch in diameter and directly over the edge of the pan of water supplied from a water drip pail above. Knowing the birds had entered the trap through the small hole to get the water, I enlarged the hole to two inches square. From August 1st to August 28th, this trap had taken nearly 400 Warblers, all having entered through this small hole. Nearly 300 of these Tennessee Warblers. The remainder being made up of the following species; Black & White, Nashville, Capemay, Myrtle, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted, Palm. Mourning, and Redstarts. Incidentally the nearly 300 Tennessees banded during this period are more than the average banded yearly by all banders together in North America. All this by a trap accidentally tripped, and a small hole.

Blue Herons - (continued from page 6)

The young are comical looking with their long legs and big bills. When angered, they look quite fierce, stretching long necks and raising the feathers on top of their heads. till it stands straight up. They don't hesitate to strike at you either and are quite capable of giving you a nasty peck.

When we left the trees that harboured the colony we came out on a beautiful flat, and there stood at least fifty Blue Herons -- a sight that is worth travelling a long distance to behold.

Alone the Byways -

(continued from page 20)

grasshoppers, it almost stepped in front of the car, but swerved in time. There was a hasty retreat to the wheat field.

In the spring we noticed a number of jack rabbits walking rather than hopping about in the fields, It was an action we had never seen before. They seemed to be searching carefully for something as each would stop from time to time and then proceed. When mentioning this to a friend later, he spoke of a rumor that at this time of year the males go on such walks in search of young rabbits to destroy them. Does anyone have further information on this theory?

Sunsets along these by ways were brilliant or dull according to the cloud formations. They were always something to watch with an uninterrupted view as we came back to town. The speedy passing of the weeks was cause for lamentation that all too soon such rides would be over until another year.

Pretty But Somewhat Smelly

(continued from page 14)

istic smell remained. Spider-flower belongs to the Capparidaceae or Caper family, in which family is the Caper used to make sauce for mutton. Incidentally, when I was a youngster we made our caper sauce from Nasturtium seeds and used their leaves in sandwiches.