

# Wanted: Good Amateur Naturalists

J. F. Roy, Meadow Lake

Director S.N.H.S.

Every person, at one time or another, is faced with the situation in which he finds himself stymied when trying to put over an idea. Teachers, in particular, know the difficulties of impressing young minds with ideas and ideals.

I can never forget an incident which occurred last spring. It was one of those glorious May mornings when the poplars were brilliant in their new greens and a gentle breeze carried the scent of fresh, sap-filled leaves through our classroom windows. I am afraid that both students and teacher were in the grip of "Spring Fever". Teen-age minds were miles away, roaming through the hills and fording the streams. "Teacher" was stressing the importance of attentive listening in mastering a foreign language.

Suddenly, an idea came to me, and I asked, "Do you people think you are really attentive listeners? Do you listen with understanding? Let's test you out, eh?" A flicker of interest appeared on their faces and they were game for the test. The test was a simple one.

"I want everyone in the room to remain absolutely silent for one minute and then tell me what bird songs, if any, you can hear through the open windows..." Silence... only the clock ticking, and the mixed humming of flies in nearby shrubbery... then the occasional call or chirp which betrayed the presence of a bird nearby. How much of it registered on these untrained ears? "Jane", I asked, "what did you hear?" "Oh there, were two birds, but I don't know what they were... maybe a robin, I don't know". Similar responses came from all over the room. "If you had known what to listen for, and had been attentive listeners, you would have heard seven distinct songs in those sixty seconds". I replied. "Seven?", they chorused, incredulity clearly written on their faces. The class had to be shown, so we brought Nature into middle of a the French class. I think they begin to understand two ideas for the first time: (1) Few of us are really keen listeners (2) Nature has innumerable sounds and signs which challenge our interest and attention.



What songs had we heard? One by one, our avian performers repeated their melodies. First came the cowbird and his ready whistle, then three varieties of sparrow - song, clay colored and vesper. Then one which they had all noticed but failed to identify, the yellow warbler. Finally, the spasmodic "chebecs" of a least flycatcher and the liquid "okerees" of a male red-winged blackbird. They were convinced.

Our reader may ask, "Why this extended tale, and how does it relate to the title?" I am trying to illustrate a point, and that is that every teacher can use Nature as a handmaiden in school lessons. Nature is all around us; we are part of it. Nature study can establish a bond of unity between the teacher and his student; it can be integrated with every subject; it deepens our sense of the beautiful and the good; it broadens the interests and enlivens the sense of young and old alike.

With a few references guides, an inexpensive field glass and a notebook, any teacher is equipped to explore the marvels all about him. The initiate can learn with his student: those with experience can pass their wisdom along and share anew in the endless delights which discovery of new phenomena provides. Thirty pairs of young eyes and ears are bound to discover new specimens, new facts, new haunts. No one is too old to learn; nothing is ever fully understood.

This year, resolve to do something about Nature study in your classroom. Start a museum, go for hikes across the fields and coulees, collect the old nests of this season's hatch, watch the animals and insects as they prepare for winter, study the birds in migration, build some bird houses... the possibilities are many. When a program

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## Baby Birds In My Garden

*Elizabeth Barker, Regina*

First the robins. The nestlings fed on my strawberries - poor ones from the edges of my patch which otherwise may have been tramped on. I could not begrudge these robins a few berries after they had so thoroughly spudded out all the cutworms from the freshly seeded garden. For a few days it was a mystery to me just what punched such holes in the ground. It would take a lot of strawberries to replace the returns from even one tomato plant cut off by a worm.

Then one baby Meadowlark which was being raised in the grass. It flew into the garden early one morning and landed in the strawberry bed with the robins. It took hold of a small berry plant on a long runner and held a real tug-of-war.

Next Ma Vesper Sparrow and her two almost full-grown paid a short visit, hunting insects under the leaves.

From July 22nd to August 2nd, a Barn Sparrow, raising one Cowbird chick was in residence around the yard. This was quite an interesting thing to see at first hand, as she struggled to raise her "problem child". I could not tell if they moved on together or if the Cowbird moved on alone, although it was just growing its tail and did not seem to hunt at all for itself. It may have been ready to return to its own parents.

The Arkansas and the common Kingbirds did not seem to have such good luck this year - one chick each, instead of three -- and then, not such regular visitors to my yard.

And last, but not least, English Sparrows, in tens and dozens, as usual.

## Dunking The Tid-Bits

*Mrs. G. W. Dowson, Mossbank*

One very hot July some years ago, I noticed the Grackles, nesting in trees across the street, being very active around the bird bath and apparently taking something out of it. Investigation showed nothing there, but later I saw that these birds were bringing moths, or what tid-bits they could find, dipping them several times in the water, and carrying them dropping to their nestlings.

The heat was so extreme during that period that the leaves turned brown around the edges, and almost dried up on the trees. Many baby birds must have died. I thought it very clever of the Grackles to try to supply the moisture needed by the tiny birds, but never before not since, have I observed such a thing.

(This practice may be more common than you think. During the nesting season this summer, Grackles came again and again to my bird bath carrying crusts of bread that they had picked up in a neighbour's yard. They would throw the bread in the water, turn it over with their bills until it became well soaked, bring it out on to the lawn and then carry away all that they could to their young. By the time that they returned to get the rest of the prepared lunch the sparrows always had cleaned up the "works". They would then have to search for another dry crust and perform the whole operation all over again. - - Editor.)

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like this is undertaken, teacher and student alike will find themselves richer in experience, in interests and in real happiness.

We, who have been faithful followers of the "Blue Jay" through the past ten years, should do everything we can to spread an interest in

nature. Encourage our town and country teachers to expand their interests; give our young people the rein and let them go from there. Saskatchewan is indeed rich, and bounteous are her crops. Our young people must come to appreciate the natural heritage which is theirs, and which beckons to them even through the windows of a French classroom.