

HOW IT IS DONE

DOUG GILROY, R.R. 2, Regina



At the last annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, Mr. Yanchinski of Naicam, said to me that he thought it would be a good plan, when showing pictures, to explain the method used to obtain them—as a help to others interested in photography. So that is the treatment I'm giving the picture of the Common Shrike.

I first noticed the pair of shrikes early in May. They seemed particularly interested in a Hawthorn bush, about a quarter of a mile from the farm buildings. I hoped they were going to like it well enough to nest there. Sure enough, a few days later I found the foundations of the nest. My camera finger began to get itchy but I refrained from bothering them in case of discouraging them. In fact I made no effort to get any pictures until the entire clutch of seven eggs were laid.

Some species of birds are much more bold than others and come to the nest fairly quickly, even with a human standing near by. The shrike is one of those birds, and I have, on previous occasions, stood within three feet of a shrike's nest while the bird came right in and settled on the eggs. However, with bold spe-

cies you will find shy individuals, and one could wait for an hour without them coming near you. My friend in the picture was inclined to be this way, so I gave up trying to wait him out, as it wasted too much time and only caused unnecessary worry to the bird. I decided to photograph him by remote control and use portrait lenses.

The nest was built about six feet from the ground—far too high for my tripod, so a kitchen table was secured one day (when my wife was away) and placed under the nest. The table provided an excellent flat form to stand on and provided the right height for my tripod to come just above the level of the nest. On the tripod I placed a dummy camera, made out of a piece of 2 x 4 and painted the necessary colors. Then I went away and left it. Now the bird would have plenty of time to investigate the strange object and find that it was a quite harmless affair.

That evening I returned and placed the real camera on the tripod. This was moved up to 13 inches from the nest. I placed a 2+ portrait lens over the regular lens. Next the flashgun was attached to the cam-

era, along with a blue No. 5 flash bulb. A blue bulb was used as the shot was to be made on daylight colored film, and the blue light resembles daylight. Lastly the remote control apparatus was attached. This consisted of an electro-magnet for tripping the shutter, about 40 feet of wire cable and a hot-shot battery to fire it. With the wire strung out through the trees, I crouched behind a small bush and waited. Almost instantly the bird came to settle on the eggs. I pressed the control button and the picture was made. The exposure was made with the lens at f/12 and the shutter 1/50th of a second.

A Kingfisher's Nest

DONALD HOOPER
Somme, Sask.

On July 10th last my brother and I made a trip to the Etomami River, which is about five miles west of Bethwell, Saskatchewan. There I found a Kingfisher's nest. Along the north side of the river was a high sandy bank. The nest was about a foot and a half below the top of the bank. The entrance to it was a hole about four inches in diameter. As soon as I saw a feather by the hole I suspected it was a Kingfisher's nest as I had seen a pair near by.

I reached my arm, full length, into the tunnel, but could not feel the end of it, so I had to dig from the top of the bank down to the tunnel. Finally, six feet from the entrance of the hole I found a little room about ten inches wide. From there I pulled six Kingfishers into the daylight. They were about the ugliest creatures I have ever seen, because their bodies were covered with blue pinfeathers. I regret that I was unable to photograph these birds as the sun wasn't shining. After I had a good look at the birds I put them back in their nest and covered up the holes I had made with bark and leaves.

That day we also found a Rose-breasted Grosbeak's nest, and we saw an immature Blackburnian Warbler. Although we didn't see many species of birds it was an interesting day.

Bird Banding — the Hard Way

WALTER MATTHEWS
Nipawin, Sask.

In August, 1952, we were at our cabin at Fishing Lake, eighty-five miles northwest of Nipawin. While out on the lake fishing we noticed a nice flock of Mallard Ducks. Thinking, perhaps, we could catch some for Billy to band if we went out at night with a spotlight, we took the battery out of the car, hooked up the spotlight, got the motor on the boat, and started out about eleven o'clock.

It was so dark that I could hardly see Billy in the front of the boat, and in about ten minutes we were thoroughly lost as the lake is over a mile wide and two miles long. After cruising around for half an hour, Billy got the ducks in the spotlight beam. I opened up the motor and the chase was one—twisting and turning at twenty miles an hour.

Billy kept the light on the ducks, and when I got up to one he grabbed it by the neck and lifted it into the boat. After banding and releasing it we started off again. A cold wind came up with a light rain and we had a rough trip but we managed to get ten ducks before we gave up.

Sitting out on a rough lake in a small boat in the middle of the night, trying to hold two ducks on your knee while another one is being banded is quite an experience.

Coming back, Billy turned the light down into the water and there were the Whitefish—thousands of them, swimming in all directions and so thick there would be ten or twelve in the beam of light at once. It was a sight that one seldom sees, and would have to see to believe. They were in about two feet of water and I suppose, hunting for food.

After watching the fish for awhile, we went back to the cabin, got a cup of hot coffee and went to bed about 3 a.m.

Out of the ten ducks Billy banded that night, one was shot at Quitnan, Georgia, and one was shot at Hazen, Arkansas, on January 2nd and 6th, 1953.