

Nature's Schoolhouse

The boys and girls will be interested to know that the Nature Essay Contest will be continued until mid-summer next year. That means that they will have two more chances to compete, not only for a quarterly prize, but for the grand prize of a Balda Camera, being awarded for the very best essay by Dick Bird, of Bird Films, Regina.

Here is what you have to do, boys and girls. Write an original story of one of your nature observations. Confine it to less than 500 words. Send your name, address, age, grade and school to the editor, L. T. Carmichael, 1077 Garnet St., Regina.

A choice of Peter mammals or butterfly Guide, plus a subscription will be given as a prize for each issue. At the end of the year we may award several awards for the best story submitted. **The deadline for the next issue is October 1, 1955.**

More entries were received than we could print, and it is unfortunately necessary to permit the printing of only a few.

Autumn Observations

By ANNE MATTHEWS, age 14,
Grade 9, Nipawin Composite High School

On a September Sunday afternoon I took a walk to our neighbour's bush. Several American Pipits flew up as I walked across the summer-fallow.

The bush was one solid mass of color. Yellows, reds, greens, and brown were all blended together. Sarsaparilla bushes ranged from yellow to brown to red. Pincherries had the mottled appearance of being green and red. Chokecherries hung black on the bushes. Since the frosts they have become very sweet.

Birds were everywhere, flying through the bush and hopping on the ground. There was a continual chatter of bird voices in my ears. Waxwings flew across the clearing looking like jet fighters with their sloped back wings. White-throated sparrows were singing their "Canada Song" from the heavy underbrush.

I sat down beside an old stub where there had once been a flicker's nest. The rufous tail of a Fox Sparrow flashed as he lit on a branch close overhead. The "quank" of a Red-breasted Nuthatch was heard as he crept along the underside of a branch looking for insects. A solemn Raven gravely flapped his way over

the bush uttering his throaty croak while the Ruby-crowned Kinglets looked at me inquisitively from the bushes not more than three feet away.

A Blue Jay screamed "Thief!" in the distance. A Robin dropped down close beside me. He was wearing a band on his left leg. I wonder who banded him? Was it my brother, Maurice Street, the Francis brothers or someone in the southern states?

As I walked along our north line, Kinglets fluttered along uttering a call somewhat like a House Wren's song. An Olive-backed Thrush flew from the bushes beside the path. Several Juncos and Whitethroats flew up from a pile of weed seeds as I walked past. Palm Warblers sat in the trees flicking their tails. In the bush a Catbird meowed monotonously.

Along the path leading to one of the bird traps a Red Squirrel chattered, warning everyone that I was near. He ran down the tree trunk and out of sight as soon as I spotted him. Warblers were everywhere, searching the undersides of the leaves for insects and larvae. Flashing Redstarts with their brilliant plumage of

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Boys' & Girls' Section

Field Guides (birds, or Wherry's Flower to **THE BLUE JAY** the best story received discretion the judges final prizes. When submit indicate your choice for the reception of will be January 15,

ived than usual this e that space will not of them.

Prize Winners: The judges, Dr. and Mrs. Houston, Cliff Shaw and Miss Margaret Belcher were unable to agree on a first prize winner, so have granted an equal placing for the essays submitted by Anne Matthews and Wilma Aim. The third prize has been awarded Heather McLaughlin. The three prizes awarded will really all be equal and have been donated by Mrs. John Hubbart, Jr., Grenfell, Dr. Jim Perdiccaris, Yorkton and Dr. George Ledingham, Regina. The prizes selected by the winners will be forwarded as soon as possible.

My Orphan Babies

By WILMA R. AIM, Age 13
Grade 9, Bredenbury High School

I have always been deeply interested in young things and especially when those young things are in distress do I feel I must do something to help if I can: such as adopting a small kitten with a broken paw, an older cat that walked on three legs and a homeless puppy. Following these came the crowning event, an orphan family of wrens.

In early summer my attention was taken by a pair of wrens who started housekeeping in a bird house perched on our clothesline post. I watched them flitting in and out for several days carrying all manner of tiny twigs then suddenly I saw them no longer; I decided they had left their new home but about two weeks later I saw a wren busily carrying food to the nest. I watched closely and at last realized that there was only one parent, some cat had probably taken the other one while the mother was sitting. For several days Mother Wren worked unceasingly but her busy life ended suddenly when my pet cat (with the now mended paw) caught her for its dinner. I sighed when I thought of the tiny ones in the nest and during the next half-hour made several trips back and forth to the clothesline where

I could hear them calling continuously. Finally I could stand it no longer and dragging up a stepladder clambered up to the nest. When the top was taken off six tiny baby wrens cowered down in the nest, silent as mice.

We took the bird house down, carried it into the house and placed it in a deep cardboard box which we covered with a screen to prevent their escape. The wrens were quite well feathered so we counted their chance of survival was quite good. Now came the task of feeding them. We couldn't very well catch grubs and worms so we tried the next best thing: a pure protein diet of hard-boiled egg which was broken into small pieces and held with the tweezers. The feeding of the wee birds surely tested one's patience for though they became less frightened they still wouldn't open their mouths freely, we just waited until one opened its mouth then pop in the food. After trying various things we found they seemed more satisfied with morsels of ground meat. They were always hungry and we soon came to know the special cry they made just

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Nature's Schoolhouse

Old Mother Nature's Fall Show

By HEATHER McLAUGHLIN, Age 12
Grade 7, Indian Head Public School

When all the birds and bees and butterflies are gone, we still have one joy left before winter comes. That is the beautiful coloring of the autumn leaves. This year we have been greatly disappointed in the fall show. Not only were the leaves not very bright, but they didn't last long.

Jack Frost has been around quite frequently this fall. People often think of the frost as helping the coloring of leaves. Scientists tell us this is not so. A heavy frost sears the leaves so that they are crisp and colorless. It also makes it easy for the wind to blow them down. What really brings out the colors, though, is this:

As winter comes the chlorophyll or green substance in the leaves is drawn back into the trunk of the tree and stored up for the coming season. As the green chlorophyll is drawn out of the leaf the basic undercolor which is yellow begins to show. Some trees, because of sugar in the sap, or acids in the soil, have a red pigment. The yellow showing through the red gives an orange coloring to some leaves. Some trees,

like the oak, have a brown tannin dye in them. The yellow showing through the brown gives these leaves their bronze color.

Along the streets of Indian Head we notice the crimson virginia creeper climbing up over the verandahs. The tall cottonwoods and Russian poplars, the last trees to turn colors, are a bright yellow. The mountain ashes are an orangish red color. The ash trees have turned a clear yellow and the elms a deep gold. Manitoba maples and carraganas don't add much to the show. The maple leaves turn yellow and drop off quickly, while the carraganas drop off without turning at all. On the other hand, the little ginella maple makes the brightest splash of all, with its brilliant scarlet and crimson leaves.

A drive through the country reveals the reds and purples of the pincherry and saskatoon bushes, and the yellows in the wild poplar bluffs. The wild rosebush has the tiniest leaves of all, but it has every one of the fall colors — red, yellow, brown, purple, bronze and orange.

MY ORPHAN BABIES

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before they opened their mouths for food.

We named the wrens and each one became an individual. Herman was the noisy one, Emily would sit off by herself and Hortense, the tiniest of all continually sang her own wee song.

A branch placed across the box soon proved a popular pastime as they seemed to enjoy hopping about on it. As the days passed they completely lost their fear and would hop onto your fingers or perch on your glasses. At night they were covered by a coat thrown over the box but when we woke one morning to find

wrens flying all over the kitchen we decided that the time had come for them to go and we transported them, box and all to a small bluff quite a distance from the house and cats. A wren scolded from the bush and one answered from the box; it flitted nearer and again called, once more they answered. We decided that they were in good hands and left them among the trees.

Since then I have been back several times and always see one or two flying about or scolding me from a branch near at hand as they are still quite friendly.

Folk may laugh and call me soft-hearted but I really enjoyed looking after my orphan wrens.

Boys' and Girls' Section

Tragedy Averted

GLEN HASS, Age 16, Grade XII
Hanley, Sask.



Since I live in a location of many bluffs and marshy wastes, I have a wonderful place to view the many mysteries of nature.

In the early spring mornings, even before the snow is completely gone, the first song birds can be heard and in the evenings the long wedges of the ducks and geese can be seen winging their way to the north. Occasionally a distant yip of a coyote can be heard in the still darkness, and peace reigns on this serene land.

In the summer the green shady nooks are alive with songs of birds and the hum of bees. Only the cool breezes move the silent trees as the sun warms the beckoning earth. In a nest in the hedge four eager open mouths are seen, and on the pond behind the garden a mother duck watches silently over her brood of ducklings, as soft waves dance by her sides. Overhead the broad wings of a hawk circle and gradually float from sight. In this peaceful world the struggle of life goes on endlessly.

One day last fall on one of my journeys I chanced upon a hawk that, at first, seemed sick, but on closer observation I found it had a broken wing and was almost starved to death. I quickly took it home and put splints on its wing. For the first day

it seemed very lifeless and the wing was extremely swollen. On the second day, however, things had changed. The swelling on its wings had gone down so much that the splints had fallen off and were useless. As I went to pick up the hawk it fought me viciously, but I managed to re-splint its wing. I fed it raw meat daily and after a month of treatment it was fully recovered and able to fly around.

In the month I cared for it, it became a little friendly toward me but to no one else. We still see him flying around the near-by sloughs.

This is one story in nature that ended on a happy note, but it could so easily have been a tragedy.

Saskatchewan Observation

by Floyd A. Thompson
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Cinnamon Teal: About mid-May, 1948, Dave Spencer (pilot-biologist) and I saw one male Cinnamon Teal near the north end of Lake of the Rivers. During late May 1949, John J. Lynch and I saw one along the Souris River northwest of Estevan. I banded a male Cinnamon Teal on Old Wives Lake about July 14, 1950.

Long-billed Curlew: I saw several Long-billed Curlew in May, 1948, but didn't notice any more until 1954. This year, however, I have seen them all across southern Saskatchewan. The northernmost observation was at Portreeve, where two were seen on July 23rd. The easternmost observation was a bird seen about four miles east of Stoughton on July 27th. Birds were observed in representative sections of Saskatchewan south of a line between these two points. Perhaps no one day presented more than two observations and some days none

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