

# 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. Submitting your story permits you to win a prize. **The deadline for the next issue is October 15, 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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# Short Story about a Squirrel's Tail

By KEN LIDDELL

(From "Furrows and Foothills," Calgary Herald)

This is a short tale about a squirrel's tail.

The squirrel, just a wee, wee, squirrel, was one of a family of quintuplets and the baby squirrels were born, of all places, in a bureau drawer.

One of the baby squirrels was rather stupid and was always falling out of the drawer and the people who lived in the room and shared the bureau with the squirrels were always putting him; or maybe it was her, back in the drawer.

The bureau is in quarters used by employees at the Gateway Inn, a restaurant just outside the entrance to Banff Park, but the family of squirrels has flown the coop, or rather the crib.

Before the family was born the mama squirrel loved to play on the roof of the building, which is a log structure, and when her hospitalization neared she somehow made her way inside the building from the roof and nestled down in the bureau drawer.

\* \* \*

No squirrel ever had more midwives. Mrs. Katherine Hicks, who runs the restaurant, and some 10 employees watched over the family for six weeks. They noticed the babies at birth were about the size of the second joint of a person's finger, and that it was 28 days before they opened their eyes.

When time came to remove the babies to their outside home, which was a spot in the attic, the mother carried them one by one in her mouth. She didn't seem too fussy about the attention the children received when in the drawer, either. When the curious went close she sat on the window and scolded.

\* \* \*

But one of the most interesting observations was made by Mrs. Ruby Pfeifer who happened to be up and about at six o'clock one morning.

She heard the mother scolding one of the children. As she watched

she saw the mother trying to train the baby to keep its tail up . . . and curved.

Mrs. Pfeifer is no particular authority on squirrels, but she is quite sure that is what the mother was doing. And like mothers often do, she was getting a little impatient with the child. Maybe it was the stupid one.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Pfeifer said it was a scene the average person would see once in a lifetime, if that often.

The mother, said Mrs. Pfeifer, would slap the baby under the tummy with one paw and at the same time would bring the other paw down in a smart clip to the back just in front of the tail.

The result, said Mrs. Pfeifer, was something of a reflex action. Something like striking a person's knee when the legs are crossed.

Anyway, up popped the tail, with a curve in it.

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black and orange, Magnolias with a conspicuous white band across the tail, and the olive-green of the Tennessee, Orange-crowned, Cape May, Chestnut-sided and Nashville Warblers.

The time had gone quickly and it was soon time to go home. Overhead a flock of Cranes was winging its way southward. Several flocks of Cranes and Canada Geese passed over that morning. Crows had been seen flocking together on the fields.

Summer has passed quickly and soon the Redpolls will be back. Each fighting to get his share of weedseeds from the feeding tray or the trap. Evening Grosbeaks will come looking for sunflower seeds. Bohemian Waxwings will eat the Chokecherries we have picked and dried for them. Snow Buntings will again be drifting over the fields and then we will know it is winter!