

## How Abundant is the Sharp-Tail?

By DONALD HOOPER, Somme, Sask.

During the last year some of the members of the Blue Jay have been concerned about the scarcity of the Sharp-tailed Grouse.

In the Somme district they seem to be fairly plentiful and so I did not realize how scarce they were until I went to work at Melville, this fall. In a month's time I only saw one although it was a typical area for them — with open fields and poplar bluffs.

I wonder if the Sharptail is plentiful enough on the prairie to stand up to the hunting seasons much longer. The time to do something about this is now. So I am asking each member of the Society to write and let me know how abundant these birds are in his district at the present time. I will then make out a report and send it to the Department of Natural Re-

sources. If the birds are found to be scarce enough we may be able to get a closed season until they are plentiful again.

I am very fond of the Sharp-tailed Grouse. They are one of my favorite birds. I like to hear them call as they dance in early morning, or to see a flock in the trees in the late fall and hear them scold and cackle. I also like to watch the Sharptail in flight as they burst up like rockets with rapid strokes of their short wings, and then glide along so gracefully.

When I think of how nice the Sharptail is I believe that we should do our best to protect it. The farmer can do his part by not lighting a fire where the Sharptails might be resting. Let's make an effort to help these birds increase, so they will be plentiful on the prairie once more.

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## INTERESTING BIRDS

By ISABELLE POWELL, Swift Current

This summer there seemed to be more Blackbirds and Catbirds in our trees than usual. One evening while we were walking near a low growing tree a Catbird flew across with something in its mouth and lit on a branch — all the time scolding "Mew" at us. We drew back a few steps and to our surprise he started singing a lovely medley of bird songs, mostly Song Sparrows' and the distinct "click click" of the Blackbird fitted in so smoothly. When we moved towards him again he slid into the angry "Mew", as though he had been telling us of his little family, and also warning us to keep away.

Several pairs of birds, something like Kingbirds, nested here this year for the first time. They had yellow breasts and no white band at the end of the tail, yet their actions were much like the Kingbird. Two of the baby birds fell out of the nest and huddled in a clump of grass for three days. One morning they were on a branch near the ground and by night had got up to a branch shoulder

high where they stayed till morning, sitting close together, like Siamese twins, to keep warm.

Hawks seemed more numerous than usual. A family of four hatched near the buildings and often flew down to the clothesline posts, where we could watch them from the window.

"What does the Meadowlark say?" you ask. One vain fellow consults me in the morning with "Look! quick! Is my cravat straight?"

During my holidays at Cypress Park I had the impression that birds were scarce here, but I changed my mind one morning when I stepped out of the cabin to get the eight o'clock news on the car radio. As I sat listening, down flew a flock of sparrows and scratched busily among the pine needles. Most of them had the white outer tail feathers of the Vesper Sparrow. One little fellow had no tail feathers — except one white one. It was August so perhaps he was molting. Then a Downy

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moulded by the defeats of man through the diseases spread by rats than the victorious armies of kings. The rat has killed scores of millions of humans. We should mobilize all our resources to exterminate it once and for all.

The Rodents are completed in Saskatchewan by two forms of Jumping Mice if the Prairie Jumping Mouse resides here, otherwise only the Saskatchewan form may be found and finally the Nebraska Yellow-haired Porcupine.

The Lagomorphs are represented in Canada by 31 forms but only 3 may be met in Saskatchewan — the White-tailed Jack Rabbit, American Varying Hare and Black Hills Cottontail. The Nebraska Cottontail is on the Hypothetical List and may have reached our area. The Lagomorphs have recently been separated from the Rodents with which they were long included on the basis of certain anatomical differences, some of which are obvious to the layman, such as the development of the legs which indeed gave rise to the term "lagomorph"; the teeth are different as well, pikas, hares and rabbits have four incisors in the upper jaw whereas rodents have two, and the incisors of lagomorphs have protecting enamel over much of the inside sur-

faces as well as over all the front surface while rodents have enamel on the front of the incisors only.

The final group is the Even-toed Ungulates or Hoofed Mammals of which there are 36 forms in Canada: 23 deer, 1 Pronghorn and 12 Bovidae, that is, Bison, Muskoxen, Sheep and Goats. The Manitoba Elk may be here (definitely in the Canadian Zone of Moose Mountain), certainly the Northern Plains White-tailed Deer but Mule Deer may not range on to the Regina Plains. While Moose Jaw has a legend concerning the origin of its name, and while the odd relics of Moose are picked up occasionally on the Plains, it does not seem likely that Moose considered the Transition Zone its normal habitat in historical times if the type of country it inhabits today is any indication—it has always been associated with Canadian Zone throughout North America; similarly with the European form, known there as Elk. The Plains Bison is extinct in the wild state, while the modern form of Muskoxen appear to be confined to the Hudsonian Zone or tundra. Mountain Sheep and Mountain Goats complete the Canadian Check-list—we have neither mountains, nor sheep, nor goats.

Frank Brazier

### FRANK BAINES HEADS SALTCOATS CONSERVATION SOCIETY

An organization meeting of the Saltcoats and district Conservation Society was held in the Saltcoats Fire Hall on Friday evening, August 20th. Officers elected were: President, Frank Baines; Vice-President, George Wiley; Secretary, Miss Patsy Hodgins; Executive, Jim Murray and L. R. Lordly. Membership fees were set at 50c for adults, 25c for high school students and 10c for public school students.

The meeting voted to affiliate with the Saskatchewan Natural History Society and adopt the "BLUE JAY" as the official bulletin of the new Society. Several projects were discussed. A delegation will attend the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society in Yorkton

on Saturday, October 23rd. The first public meeting at Saltcoats will be held after harvest.

### INTERESTING BIRDS

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Woodpecker appeared around the nearest tree trunk. On the other side, where a clump of Saskatoon and Raspberry bushes grew, a Robin and two Waxwings were eating the berries. Later when picking Saskatoons, I noticed little three-cornered nips in the berries. Do the saucy fellows taste them before eating them? When startled they all fly up into the tall pine trees, and you wouldn't know there were any birds around.

Squirrels are plentiful here too. One amused us by scampering across the clearing with a whole slice of toast in his mouth. I could just hear him call "Breakfast is ready children".