

OUR NEIGHBORS

N. E. Robinson

Our neighbors are squatters. They came some years ago without invitation and made their home in our front yard. Each year they bring Spring with them when they return from wintering in the South. Travel restrictions have not affected them and the Mister of the family wears the latest fashion in masculine clothes and struts his red waistcoat with the cockiest of manner. Mrs. Robin, slightly smaller and more subdued is too busy home making to bother about clothes.

The neighborhood is combed for pieces of string, bits of bright wool or cotton to fasten the nest and line it. One year the writer watched a pair of Robins building a nest on the top of a round water drain on the eaves of the house next door. The wind whirling through between the houses, blew the twigs and sticks away as fast as they could get a few in place. After the third attempt Mr. Robin took steps to remedy the trouble. He flew away and came back with a long string, two or three feet, which he fastened securely around the pipe and then tied the twigs to it. That nest was in a windy location but was held solid and safe.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Robin work steadily to gather materials for the nest and as soon as it is ready the four eggs are laid and Mrs. Robin begins setting. A tiresome business it must be to sit on a nest all day and all night in wind or rain. Mrs. Robin leaves the nest to get food and water, and while she is away Father takes over. Our friend of the water pipes must have been a young Father for he used to sit with his tail to the wind and every gust blew him precariously like a sail, so that he rocked back and forth on the nest. By the time his mate arrived back he looked as harrassed and out of sorts as most males do after half an hour of family responsibility. Mrs. Robin would look at him in disgust and turn and face the wind which smoothed her feathers down flat.

The day comes when the proud parents realize they have four big mouths to feed, and you can soon tell

when this responsibility has arrived by the daring way Father and Mother hunt for food, showing little fear of humans. If the garden is being dug and has plenty of fat angle worms, they are almost under the fork waiting for a victim. They believe "the best is none too good" for their family, so do not kill the worm but coil it around the beak like a piece of string. With this squirming warm meal they fly home. There the parent holds one end of the worm while each youngster takes a bit in turn if the worm is long enough for four bites. If it is a smaller worm those that get a bite have to wait the next time, so that all have a fair chance.

Young Robins are like human alarm clocks and rout their parents out for food, shortly after daylight, and from then on they keep their mouths open wide. When you see a Robin darting here and there turning his head this way and that — he is not performing for your benefit. He is a listening post and when a worm moves near the surface of the soil, he pounces and pulls a meal out of the ground. That is why you see him where water is spraying on grass. He probably does not like the bath too well but it helps him find the necessary food quota, by bringing the worms to the surface.

When at last the ugly darlings of the Robin family begin to look less like a huge cavity and more like a bird it will soon be time to fly. This day is a crisis in the young lives. Once out of the nest they seldom return. When Mrs. Robin thinks they are ready, she takes up a position on a branch of a tree or nearby roof about the height of the nest. There she starts calling, giving encouragement with every call. In our drain pipe family there was one timid soul, who would get to the edge of the nest and be ready to take off and then get nervous and fall back into the nest frightened out of his wits. The mother encouraged and coaxed for a long time but it was three hours before he would venture. I am afraid, long before that, his mother was scolding him for a coward for she sounded very angry. However,

like some humans, he seemed more proud than any of the others when at last he landed safely.

Following the flight from the nest there is a day or two of anxiety until the wings are strong and sure enough to carry their owner quickly from the path of a sneaking cat. Last year I helped our neighbor stand guard, sometimes chasing a four-legged enemy away, sometimes chasing the young Robin up to a higher perch when he thought, in his ignorance, safety lay on the ground. I am sure Mrs. Robin will expect my help again this year for she has her family in a branch just outside my bedroom window where she knows I can help her keep watch.

Bluebird Arrives April 10

M. M. NAIR, Grande Prairie, Alta.

I doubt if the word that I saw a Bluebird on April 10th this year is any record but with the cold and backward Spring we are experiencing in our Peace River country this year, it may be so. Yesterday, April 18, on a drive of about ten miles we saw such a great number of owls, seemingly of all sizes and kinds but the most outstanding was a Snowy, sitting in a particularly snowed over world like a slab of snow, until the movement of his head made us realize it was a bird.

New Historical Society

Our best wishes are extended to the new club recently organized at Spy Hill. The club has adopted the name of "The Wolverine Hobby and Historical Society." Members of the group from Tantallon, Welby, Hazelcliffe, Gerald, Russell and Spy Hill are planning an active program.

President is Mr. W. J. McDonald of Yorkton; vice-president, Mrs. F. C. Dafoe, Spy Hill; and secretary-treasurer, A. M. Provick of Hazelcliffe. This group was formed to foster hobbies and preserve historical data. The name "Wolverine" was chosen in that it was the name of a hill now known as Spy Hill. It is also the name of creeks in Manitoba and Saskatchewan with historical significance.

— Cliff Shaw, Yorkton

Nature Briefs

On April 27 we counted thirty-five deer grazing in the field near the house. They show very little fear of us — perhaps because we do not allow any shooting on this farm.

— Mrs. Robert Greenbank, Kelso

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I hope the name of the "Blue Jay" will not be changed but I think it might be designated as Western Canada's Nature Magazine, rather than Saskatchewan's, since Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia letters are not lacking in the issues, I have noticed.

—M. M. Nair, Grande Prairie, Alta.

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Stuart J. Francis, of Sprucedale Farm, Torch River, applied for a bird-banding permit this past winter. Assisted by his brother, Stanley, and his father, C. Stuart Francis, he made the necessary trapping equipment. They trapped and banded 100 birds the first day. Perhaps this is a record for the first day of banding.

Congratulations, Stuart! I'm sure the readers will wish you the best of luck in your new and interesting hobby.

— Billy Matthews, Nipawin, Sask.

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The "Blue Jay" is too good to miss. Its informative and cheery articles give me happy moments. It is good to read what others are doing who have the same interests as I . . . My first crow was heard on the 15th of March, and that one signal has given me the spring fever to study migrants as they pass through this central fly-way, the Red River Valley. If all other bird watchers are as eager as I am, not much will be missed.

— Mrs. Bill Adams, Winnipeg

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A scout swallow usually pays us a visit in March. For several years it has been on the 28th — my wife's birthday. Last year it was the 29th. There is no mistake about it, as it comes inside the barn where it usually nests, and perches on an iron hook near the door. I have been able to get a good look at it from a distance of a few feet. It only comes around noon and is away. Then we see it no more until they come to stay.

—Walter Lunn, Brombury, Sask.