

# The Bluebirds of Burnt Butte

By STUART P. JORDON, REGINA

THE Blue head and back against the orange of the burnt shale was as masterful a combination as the blue and the orange of a sunset. This then is my title. Each incident, enough in itself to require a story, will be briefed to a panoramic passage of wildlife the like of which I never have seen. I have travelled from Lac La Ronge to the Cypress Hills and I have walked and lived in the hills for the past three months. Bubbling as nature enthusiasts do, my thoughts must be controlled to a minimum of words.

Well I remember the gravel-throated brothers of the crow at La Ronge. Symbols of the wild north.

The Pileated Woodpecker at Waske-siu flashing through camp—his head afire. How thrilled I was to see this, the biggest and rarest of woodpeckers. How proud Mrs. Merganser looked with her feet of young. So desperately she herded them away from my boat.

The Cypress Hills abound in birds. I have seen at least fifty species. An expert would have identified many more. What a magnificent spectacle they make as they move across the summer scene. Like the flowers there seems to be a different kind for each passing day.

The Rail has ceased its persistent squeak. So persistent and annoying was this squeak that it led Dr. Kupsch, for whom I worked this summer, and I to name a small lake near Eastend—Rail Lake, in honour of this sleep awakening demon of the swamp.

Belted Kingfishers still flash over shrunken waters. But the blue and white have paled. Mourning Doves by the hundreds can be seen every day now as I have seen them all summer. Never have I seen so many. The Ring-necked Pheasant seems to have

stopped squawking so loudly. Papa helps to rear the family so marital duties may be too pressing. I'll never forget the night a pair of Canada Geese kept me awake for hours by honking close by our camp. The positively matchless song in a windless valley of the Hermit Thrush has ceased. The Blue Heron still gracefully and majestically flaps and statue-like stands for fish both day and night. Their call reminds me of someone strangling a low pitched quacking duck! The Lark Buntings no longer whisper music from above. Their tiny forms have vanished from the blue. Crows are flocking, soon their numbers will blacken brown fields. Where is the Osprey I saw this spring? What a magnificent bird this King of the Fishers as it whisked to the water's surface only to fail because of the King of Tormentors—the Kingbird. Does the young Ferruginous Hawk I captured in July soar on high? What huge, impressive nests these birds build. They dot the most rugged cliffs. Still they are found on sloping grass-covered hillsides. Seeing and then climbing up to one of these masterful, poised high structures and then to look down to the valley floor hundreds of feet below makes one marvel at the miracle of flying, makes one feel far away from the crush of living in this modern world.

When the big black shadow passed over me I knew it was not a hawk. And then another. There they were so close as they circled the high butte on which we were working. They made you wonder what they would do if you were a carcass. Their small bare heads looked searchingly downward and then they sailed away in quest of deader game. Turkey Vultures visited us again at other times during the summer but never so closely as the first carrion hunting crew.

I'll always remember the scolding of the Rock Wrens. These brown inhabitants of barren, rocky wasteland enlivened many a hot and dusty day.

The first time that I heard the smashing whap in total darkness of a Beaver's tail, I left the ground in positive fright. Now, in knowledge, I enjoy this warning slap. Enjoy the brown head and furrowed water as he sets out in twilight for food.

The Coyote still howls in the Cypress Hills. May he forever do so. How eerie yet how wonderful. The Hills seems wilder for that call. The night and moon move as they were before man.

Each coulee seems to have its deer family. The deer trails. The stray, white, gnawed, discarded antler. The bedding spots. What a tingling thrill to flush an antlered Buck with flashing tail. What speed, what fluid, effortless jumps.

Snakes have been a rarity in our lives. This rareness was shaken when we met a huge Bull Snake face to face. He was at least four feet in length and I would think one would need both hands to circle his girth. He looked at us with true reptilian disdain and then slowly slithered down into his den.

Here I have seen the Jack, the Cottontail and the Snowshoe Rabbit all living in the same coulee.

On August 27th we encountered twenty mighty Sage Hens. Black-bellied and star-tailed they were a joy to see.

There are still wild herds in the Hills though the Buffalo in their thousands have gone. We thrilled many a time to the sight of from seven to thirty of these brightly colored, faster than all other plain creatures, the true symbol of this corner of the province—the Antelope. Look! See them race over the valley floor then up, up the Frenchman outcrops. See the Buck lagging—guarding the rear. Then they're gone.

Brown and dry is the grass on the Hills as September approaches. Birds have lost their color and their song.

But I have found pleasure that I can never lose. I have found the treasure of blue breasts on orange shale nests.

*“Something hidden, go and find it,  
Go and look behind the ranges,  
Something lost behind the ranges,  
Lost and waiting for you —  
Go.”*

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## Observations from a City Window

By H. A. and FRANCES CROOME,  
Regina, Sask.

Each spring for years we have planted sunflower seed so that in the Fall we may have the pleasure of a visit from the Goldfinches before they travel south.

This year, on August 30, we noticed for the first time a Brewer's Blackbird perched on a sunflower head eating away at the not quite ripe seeds. The next day we counted eight blackbirds swaying on the plants. They seem to have taken possession of the garden and bird bath, chasing from the latter any robin that dares to perch on the edge or tries to go near the water.

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## Among the Trees

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ing a Manchurian Pear tree more than anything else, while the other type is quite different from the usual Cottonwood also.

Another beautiful tree is the Butternut or White Walnut, with its spreading habit of growth, with light green soft feeling alternate fifteen to seventeen inch leaves, and yellow twigs.

Now if you want to grow a couple of hardy and pretty native shrubs try the following: the first fairly tall and upright is the Highbush Cranberry, with its large bunches of white flowers followed by bright red fruits, and the other is the Shrubby Cinquefoil, or Potentilla. It grows to about three feet, is very spreading in shape and is just covered with bright yellow flowers all summer long.

Now it's time to go. I will stroll with you through some of the other trees next time we get a chance.