

## A REWARDING PURSUIT

*Hugh McLaughlin, Lewvan*

PERHAPS the man who had picked a rooster off its perch, deftly bled and plucked it, and in complacent ease could conjure up a roast fowl, would be a bit pained if you asked him to arise early in the morning—before dawn and go wading in some marsh—on the possible chance of bringing home some wild game. He would not know that your shivering in the chill dawn was not from cold alone, but partly an appreciation of the hunt—a tingle not unlike that of your eager bird dog.

Another state similar to this might be the early rising hunter who could not view without some dismay the "hunter" who departed for the marshes without a gun but rather with an open ear and eye—field glasses or camera—a different approach of the same quarry—but the call of the wild just as impelling. True, the red morning sky as it emerges from the grayness overlying the horizon—the reeds that appear from the shadows in the waters—

the soft sounds of awakening life—liquid tones of a bittern—a curious marsh wren whose quarters you have invaded—a V in the water as the surface is pushed aside by a muskrat—all these sounds and sights are for both hunters.

This similarity ends suddenly with the first blast of a hunter's gun—an amazing roar of wings fills the air—circling—wheeling—whistling targets—and all else is forgotten. Quite a few people are attracted to hunting before any more profound thoughts of nature's creatures enter their minds, but it is a step forward to be able to perceive that all game is not brought home in a bag. That to live quietly beside this wildlife—to pry into their secret lives and to contemplate their sounds—to come home with a picture in the mind only of some aspect of the lives of the marsh is also a rewarding pursuit. Long after the bones are picked from a bird, the morning sky over the marsh and the whistling wings remain fixed in our memory.

## Across Western Canada with the Birds in December

*Clarissa Stewart, Fairy Hill*

*"One for sorrow, two for joy,  
Three for a girl and four for a boy,  
. . . . Seven for a secret."*

THE only rhyme came to mind as we commenced our long drive from central Saskatchewan to interior British Columbia. A Magpie soared across our path: "One for sorrow," said I, and a second appearing—"two for joy." Then I ceased to count, for they flew, with their lustrous ebony heads and shining snow-white cowls, at frequent intervals, from the Qu'Appelle Valley to the Okanagan Valley; south of the border between the State of Washington to the Province of British Columbia. One wonders what these predators feed upon when the songbirds have migrated, leaving empty nests.

On the Regina plains a small flock of blackbirds were observed and companies of Barn Pigeons gleaned from the wheat left by grain trucks on the highways. Then Snow-bunt-

ings in large gatherings began to fly before the wind, veering with each gust. These appeared all across Dakota and Montana in the wintry landscape. A Downy Woodpecker was seen on the trunk of a tree in a small town. On a snowy wind-swept plain, east of the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington, a bedraggled Meadowlark staggered uncertainly by the side of the road. Poor thing! It couldn't long survive the snow and raw damp weather, and we were driving too fast to try and rescue it.

Coming westward on the Kamloops road, a solitary belated Robin flitted from tree to tree in the mild Okanagan air. A flock of Blackbirds, not yet gone to winter quarters, crossed the road and settled on a rail fence. And near the barns of a small farmstead a tree appeared to be laden with some sort of plump fruit, which on closer view, proved

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