

JANUARY-1953

Mrs. John Hubbard, Grenfell, Sask.

It was a beautiful day, New Year's, when we went out to take our bird census, clear sky and hoar frost.

Birds were noticeable by their absence, but we found the usual flock of 100-odd Redpolls on the roadside weeds past the school. On to the Tiree road and turning north we notice the absence of bush rabbit tracks around sloughs and bush tho there hadn't been snow for a long time. In opener country we noticed one field where Jack Rabbits had made well-packed trails.

Down the Tiree hill into the Qu'Appelle Valley. Something new in colours there, a symphony of greys; the usual winter purples masked by hoar frost and mist away in the distance. Just before ascending the hill on the north side I got out of the car. An almost summer medley of voices confused me. I called on John for aid. Before he got there a Ruffed Grouse let out a characteristic call and rustled away in the bush. A Blue Jay, also unseen, squawked and disappeared around a small hill. Some Redpolls drifted off ahead with friendly cheerful notes. Some other small birds with a call unfamiliar to me departed hurriedly and remained unidentified. In the distance Chickadees called.

John and I rejoined the noisy crew in the car and ascended the Tiree hill. On the road north to Neudorf John's eagle-like eyes picked out an Eagle coming our way. We stopped and eventually with glasses I was able to spot him—and adult Bald Eagle with white head and tail—the first adult Bald Eagle I've ever seen.

On north thru quite thickly bluffed country the odd Magpie but not as plentiful as last year, an odd Sharp-tailed Grouse and large flocks of Redpolls. We counted some of Neudorf's Sparrows, and returned across the Qu'Appelle Valley by the Hyde hill. Springs were frozen in cascades on the north bank but in the Valley one was running and the river was partly open.

Home we counted our long-with-us flock of Pine Grosbeaks, our usually

troublesome Hairy Woodpeckers, our own House Sparrows, and a Horned Owl that turned up late that afternoon after I had remarked that they were getting scarce.

On the 5th of January we saw a Vesper Sparrow, very much alive and perky although it was around zero.

Bohemian Waxwings pay us the odd visit but they don't stay long. They evidently think the Pine Grosbeaks have priority on the dried crabapple crop in the orchard. The Grosbeaks have been here since November and varied in number from 12 to the present flock of around 25, and only one brightly coloured bird in the lot. The pup, always a bit crazy, also eats crabapples that he digs up, chews, and spits out the remains. The Grosbeaks eat large quantities of snow—John figures the fruit is pretty well dehydrated by now. They also feed on the honeysuckles and snowberries.

P.S. February 1, 1953: The Waxwings returned, 150 strong. They fluttered and rattled and denuded the trees of fruit. The ground beneath the trees was red with fallen fruit, which is now covered with snow. They left. I'm afraid the Grosbeaks have gone too—there's nothing left to eat.

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A Winter Canvas

By Ray Peterson,

R.R.2, Tofield, Alberta.

When the gay, riotous, color-splashed handiwork of autumn fades to the lonely, leaf-bare landscape of late fall, one is tempted to think that beauty has packed her luggage and departed for the winter. But Mother Nature, fortunately, is an artist at heart. She paints out the drab, dead remains of summer's luxuriant living with a bold, generous brush of snow. Then, in moments of sheer ecstasy

and inspiration, calls in her co-worker, Jack Frost, and creates a masterpiece of beauty and ingenuity.

Such was a morning, one day this winter. The entire countryside was touched with the magic of heavy hoar frost.

The nude poplar trees were transformed in new, sparkling gowns. A beautiful, exotic jungle of white fronds, tufts, and lacy foliage shimmered and glistened where, only the evening before, had been an uninteresting tangle of willow bushes and underbrush. Grass and small shrubs flourished in sprays of tinsel. Strangely pronged and nubbed as the frost collected on their spines, rose bushes offered their red haws like a display of deliciously frosted bon-bons. Paralleling the road ran a line of jewell-encrusted staffs strung with delicately wrought garlands, a series of intricate knots masking the sharp barbs of the wire fence. A big granite boulder stood up proudly, its weather-scarred sides softened and scintillating, like a throne for some snow queen to hold court from.

Lithe, graceful, a weasel poked inquisitively about a group of small, gem-studded pyramids, pocket gopher mounds. From a clump of frost-plumed pigweed a flock of Redpolls twittered, patterning the snow with myriads of tiny tracks. Dee! Dee! a Chickadee sang cheerfully, and as he flitted among the branches of a birch tree he loosened showers of twinkling diamonds. A coyote's trail along the edge of a meadow was filled in with shiny particles, and from an open sidehill, the dark mouth of an old groundhog den showed a throat fringed and whiskered in white.

The sun heightened, a slight breeze trembled through the fairyland of diamond and crystal and sparkling white. Soon, this glistening, jewell-hung tapestry of fragile lace and exquisite carvings would vanish. But the beauty of it would be a thing to remember, to marvel at, and to be looked forward to, again.

The March of Days

Elizabeth Cruickshank, Regina

*"There is no greater eloquence I know
Than sun and frost setting the day
aglow."*

So many of these eloquent days this mild winter. On one we drove to Lumsden to find "a silent loveliness, on hill and wood and field." Ridges in the stubble fields made rhythmic patterns of gold and white, the fields made merry by flocks of snow buntings rising and falling like waves. We saw no other birds. Tracks and tunnels led from the stooks, some short leaps, as if made with dancing feet, but the fan-shaped impressions where tails were used as brakes, were mute evidence of sudden changes in direction. How dangerously deermice live.

Cactus spines were soft now so the dogs walked in comfort on the hill. Judy showed us the very cactus that kept her wee bantam chick impaled a whole July day.

On how many days has our yard been a fairyland, when even Sparrows made a charming picture in the maple, frost petals falling at their feet as they flew down for breakfast; days when everywhere was gleaming crystals or glistening frost; when, by the creek, dock made "silver candles straight;" when grass crunched underfoot; when frost filagree transformed every humble weed.

Kingsley has urged us to "treat beauty wherever we see it as a way-side sacrament." A clump of lovely pale green western dock, with its dense fruiting heads, provided the "charmed draught, the cup of blessing" on one silver and gold and blue day.

How many times muskrat burrow entrances have been unbelievably beautiful, wreathed exquisitely with diamonds and stars.

The one surprise for us this winter on the golf course was a Ring-necked Pheasant's arrow track on fresh shallow snow.

In this small territory we have stored treasurable memories of the beauty and mystery of the varied dramas of life in all seasons.