

NATURE'S SCHOOLHOUSE

It is with pleasure that we publish the results of the **BLUE JAY** contest. The judges, Mrs. John Hubbard, of Grenfell, and Mrs. Stuart Houston, of Carvel, Alberta, arrived too late to be examined by the judges, but is certainly was not classified higher than third. The story is highly commendable. Entrants will be eligible for the grand Jubilee Year prize. See rules of competition for the reception of material for the next issue.

The first three prizes will be a Field Guide of the winner's choice to the **BLUE JAY**.

- 1st—**Henry Savard**. Prize donated by Dr. C. J. Houston, Yorkton.
 2nd—**Bob Buhr**. Prize donated by Dr. Sigga Houston, Yorkton.
 3rd—**George M. Hruska**. Prize donated by Dr. Stuart Houston, Carvel, Alberta.
 Honorable mention: **Jimmy Zulkoskey** and **Anne Matthews**.

A Marshland Experience

Henry Savard, Stony Plain Memorial High School, Carvel, Alberta
 (Age 15)

The stillness of the summer morning was broken by a piercing "kuk, kuk-k-k-k-k-kuk." I remained motionless and peered into the grasses and reeds of the marsh, trying to get a glimpse of the bird that was making the strange noise. The sound was uttered again, not more than twenty feet from me, but still I could not detect the owner of that bewitching voice. Finally I gave up and started for home, very puzzled and thrilled from the morning's occurrence. What wanderer of the marshes had made that odd cry? The question remained unanswered, but I vowed I would return and find out.

Not more than a week later, I again visited the marsh, hoping to learn more of the strange bird that seemed to be constantly under cover. I cautiously entered the tall grasses of the marsh and began to walk as silently as possible, hoping that the clever hider I was in search of would be unaware of my presence. I halted and stood stalk-still, for from out of the reeds and grasses ahead came the rolling cackle that had lured me into this wet secluded spot. I immediately started forward, but when I had reached the place from whence the voice had come, nothing could be seen.

Suddenly I spotted a little path in the mud, made by the passing of many tiny feet. I followed this path for a short distance, and what I

found was more than I could have hoped for. There, in an elevated clump of grass, was a cleverly concealed nest. The stems of the grasses were so arranged as to form a canopy over the nest. In it were twelve eggs, buff in color, and spotted chiefly on the large end with brown and gray.

My attention was averted from the nest by a rustling noise. Out into an open patch of mud, not more than ten feet away, ran a bird which I had never seen before. The upper part of the body was olive-brown. The belly and under coverts were white, and the sides and flanks were barred with a slaty black and white. The fore-part of the head, the chin, and the throat were black, and the sides of the head, the neck, together with the breast were a bluish grey. This bird began to run about, spreading its stubby wings and uttering a few cackling notes. The display only lasted for a short while, and the bird disappeared just as suddenly as it had appeared.

When I returned home I learned from a bird book that this bird is known as the Sora Rail. Although little known to most people, it is one of the most abundantly occurring birds of North America.

Feathered Courage

By Bob Buhr, Grade VII,
 Mennon School, No. 1508

Last spring a pair of Brown Thrashers had a nest, made of dry twigs and weeds under a fallen log in our calf pasture. It was very well

BOYS' and GIRLS' SECTION

ory contest. The type of the material submitted is outstanding in quality, Yorkton, felt that the quality was nearly equal. The entry from Jimmy Zulkoskey, Grade VI, Prince Edward School, Prince Albert, received an honorary mention. Because of his age, the entry of George Hruska, Grade V, Prince Edward School, Prince Albert, received an honorary mention. It may be necessary later to make two classes of entries. All of these contests will be held in the 1953 Christmas issue. We ask that these rules be strictly followed. The deadline for entries will be April 15. (Earlier than mentioned in the rules.)

Those receiving honorable mention are being awarded a year's subscription to "The Blue Jay".

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concealed and I doubt if I would have discovered it if it had not been for one of the birds, which flew up just in front of me. There were four oddly shaped yet beautifully colored eggs in the nest.

After that I visited the nest often. Each time I came to the nest the birds made a great fuss and often dived right at me, only to swerve to one side and whiz past my head.

A few days later two eggs hatched. The third egg disappeared and I don't know what became of it. After that they dived at me more and more and seemed to come closer to my head with each dive, with their dagger-like bill. By then I was getting a bit frightened, but my curiosity wouldn't allow me to leave without seeing the young ones again. So I pulled my coat over my head and walked up to the nest to take a peek. At that moment one of the parents struck me in the back. It didn't hurt but I walked away and didn't bother the courageous Brown Thrasher until I was sure the young had left the nest.

About two weeks later I went to see the nest. The young had left and the parents had disappeared—but the fourth egg was still there, unhatched.

An Experience With A Horned Owl

Jimmy Zulkoskey, Grade VI,
Prince Edward School, Prince Albert

On Wednesday afternoon, January 13th, my sister and I found an injured owl on our way to school. The



Mr. E. W. Brooman, President of the Prince Albert Natural History Society, and Principal of Prince Edward School, feeding the owl.

owl was hanging upside down on a branch. We tried to capture it, and after a hard time managed to put it in a box. It seemed very sick but could fly a little.

We brought it to school the same afternoon and a large cage was soon made. In a few days everyone was interested in Hooty's welfare.

The owl was savage at first, but soon kindness overcame its fears. It soon learned to take the food that we gave it. It took no notice of the children, but when a dog came into

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the room, the owl puffed out its feathers and tried to fly at it.

Hooty would take meat from our teacher's hand. It would eat the food like a dog gulping chunks of meat. It always took the food gently and never tried to bite Mr. Brooman.

All this time we noted that something was wrong with Hooty. Our teacher thought that he had been shot, but he didn't want to hurt Hooty in order to find out.

On Friday, January 29th, Hooty took a sudden turn for the worst. On Saturday, despite our care, Hooty was dead.

Later the owl was examined and it was found that it had apparently flown into a wire and broken a bone in its chest.

Camp Mascot

Anne Mathews, Age 14,

Grade VIII, Nipawin Public School

One summer while we were holidaying in our cabin at Fishing Lake, we happened to look out of the window—and what do you think we saw? There was a bear cub, eating scraps out of a syrup pail that was sitting on a table on the lot next to ours. The little fellow had to stand on its hind legs to reach the pail with its paws. The queer thing about it was that he wouldn't let the pail roll off the table.

Teddy, as we called him, soon had the scraps cleaned up and came walking around the cabin. He would look through the window at us. Our dog, Pat, got very excited. We let Pat outside and he ran after Teddy, chasing him through the bush. Pat came back puffing. In a few minutes we saw the bear peeking around a tree—away they went again.

By this time the dishes were washed and Daddy thought he would go for a boat ride. Pat went down to the beach with us to watch. When Daddy came back to shore he told us what had been happening behind our backs. We were standing on the beach and on the bank above us Teddy had been watching too.

Several campers with their tents pitched at the Rangers' Beach were disturbed during the night by the cub prowling among their supplies.

We saw Teddy occasionally after that, but as more people came in, his visits were not so frequent. Finally we had to leave for home and on our return visits we didn't see any more of Teddy.

Chipper—The Squirrel

George M. Hruska, Gerald, Sask.

Grade XII, Age 19

Red squirrels may often become aggravating nuisances once they become established in a farm yard. They will gnaw holes in practically every building in the yard. This is just what happened when dad found a squirrel doing its contemptible work in the ice house and workshop. He shot the squirrel, but at the time of the shooting did not know that the same squirrel was rearing her family in an empty Bluebird house which she found to be ideal for the purpose.

Luckily there was only one young in her litter for I took the orphan into the house and started it on its adopted life by feeding it milk-soaked bread with an eye-dropper. Since "Chipper" was about a month old when I took him in the house, he didn't like the idea of the eye-dropper. I therefore tried the spoon and saucer method and found that this was just what he wanted. In a short time he started eating almonds which we had to buy to keep his tummy full. He also ate other things such as sunflowers, corn, peanuts, barley, lettuce, carrots, etc. His favorite item however was a spoon or two of fruit



Photo of Chipper by G. Hruska

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juice which he finally begged at mealtime as he went from one person to another.

In the fall, when storage time came, he hid almost every kind of food in his large bed (a box 6'x3'x3', with a nest in one corner). We even picked wild hazelnuts to help him out. The funniest part of all was that there would be two or three nuts in every space and corner of the house, including everybody's hair and pockets. The majority of the stuff, however, went into his bed.

We kept him loose in the verandah for the whole summer and fall, only letting him into the kitchen at feeding time. About this time he started chewing holes in the wall, so we figured it was time to let him out, as none of us had the heart to kill him. This we did, and he thoroughly enjoyed his freedom.

Since we live on the very banks of the Cutarm Valley, he would spend most of his time there, only coming home in the morning and at noon to get his nuts and fruit juice, and then in the evening to sleep in his nest in the house. Then one day, for some reason or other, he failed to come for his meal. We never saw "Chipper" again.

He was a very tame fellow. We could play with him and pat him anywhere. What he liked best was for somebody to stretch out a bare arm and let him slide down it—like on a fire-escape. He wasn't afraid of anything. He would tease the dog, and cats endlessly by jumping on them very agilely or biting their tails. Perhaps one of these pranks led to his downfall.

A Feeding Block

Geo. M. Hruska, Gerald, Sask.

The accompanying photograph shows a Chickadee sitting on one of my feeding blocks which has holes plugged with lard and tallow. Since I have up to twenty Chickadees at my feeding station there are always one or two birds who are brave enough to eat from my hand, so a close-up picture isn't hard to get.



A Flicker's Charm

Donald Hooper, Somme, Sask.

To me, the Yellow-shafted Flicker is a very interesting bird. Although he can't sing like a Red-eyed Vireo, there is something charming about the way he emphasizes the words, "flicker, flicker, flicker," as if he were announcing his presence. He is not arrayed in brilliant orange like the Baltimore Oriole, still it is a thrill to see his polka-dot breast, black neck-piece, the brown black-barred back, the red triangle at the back of his head, the white rump, the black V at the base of the tail, and Oh! what a beautiful yellow he shows under his wings and tail as he flies by.

In the summertime as I walked through the pasture I was startled by the rustle of wings. Then I saw a Flicker fly up from an ant hill and glide along, as only woodpeckers can, and land on a distant fence post. He was a majestic silhouette as he made his flicker-call. The event leaves a