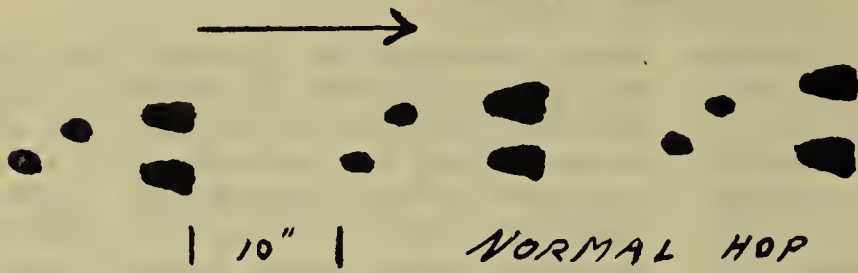


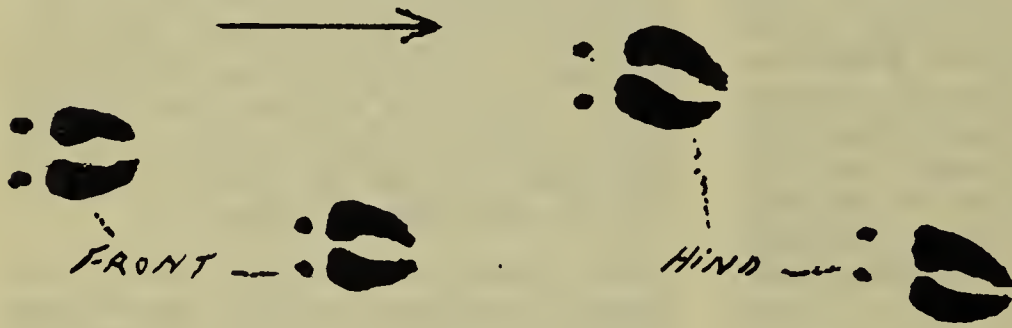
# Tracks in the Snow



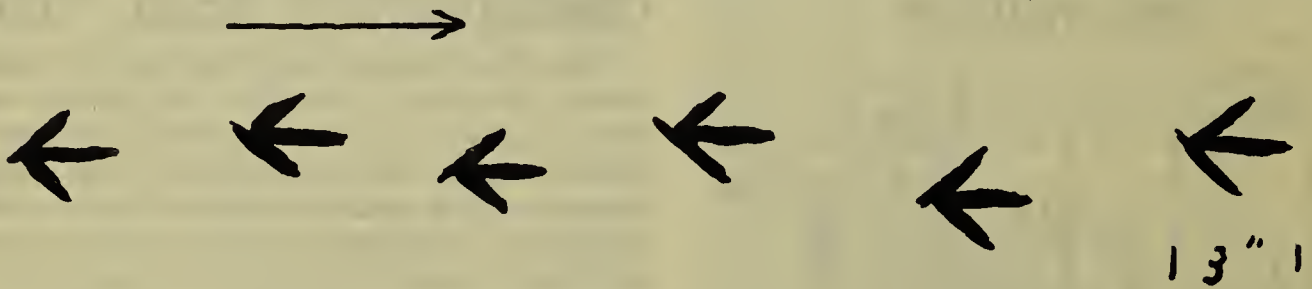
SNOWSHOE RABBIT



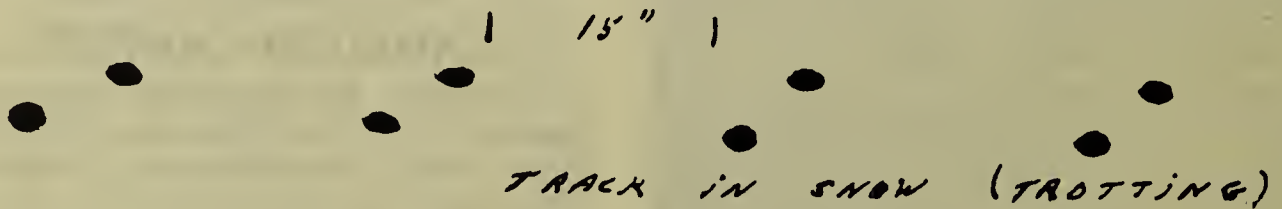
HIND FOOT



VIRGINIA WHITE-TAILED DEER



RING-NECKED PHEASANT



COYOTE

JCS

# Tracks in the Snow

By J. C. SHAVER, Regina

During the winter months many of Mother Nature's family are still about and their travels may be read by the signs that they leave. The footprint of the snowshoe rabbit, as he hurries across an opening in a bluff, the teeth marks in a tree that show where a porcupine has dined, and many other signs, will add a great deal of interest to those who enjoy hiking along a trail in search of birds and animals that stay with us during the winter months.

It is surprising just how many of us do not recognize the various tracks and signs left by our winter residents. A lot more enjoyment and interest in the outdoors could be gathered if people would only use their eyes a little more and notice the signs about them.

There is such a field to cover in trail craft that I will attempt to discuss only the more common species of birds and animals. While my drawings leave much to be desired I trust that you will bear with me and I sincerely hope that you will find the material of interest.

## SNOWSHOE RABBIT

The snowshoe rabbit, or varying hare, is more numerous than any other hare in this province. Its name is derived from its large hind foot and toes that spread to form a "snowshoe" surface on the snow. It has a brown suit in summer and a white one in winter. Where this species is numerous it forms well established trails in the woods. While their trails are more noticeable in the winter they can be detected during the summer months by a careful observer. The snowshoe rabbit rests at the base of a tree, under a log or bush pile. It seeks heavier shelter during the winter months. Often times its zig-zag track over an open spot in a bluff will tell of an attack by a Snowy Owl or other bird that depends on it to a certain extent for its food.

A most interesting difference between the rabbits and the hares is that the hares are born furred, have their eyes open and are active from the day of birth. Rabbits are born practically naked and their eyes do not open until they are from eight

to ten days old. Both the snowshoe rabbit and the jackrabbit are really hares.

## VIRGINIA WHITE-TAILED DEER

The white-tailed deer or "jumper", as it is often called, is the most common member of the deer family in Saskatchewan and may be found throughout the province except in the far north. The young are born during late May or June and the fawns are spotted. Any person who has accidentally come across a young fawn in the spring will know how well they are camouflaged. Fawns should be left alone. Often the touching of a fawn will make the mother leave the young. The male or buck carry antlers and these antlers are shed each year during the winter months. Antlers are seldom found in the field as porcupines, mice and other rodents gnaw on them for the minerals they contain. The white-tailed deer are browsers and eat the branches and small limbs of certain shrubs and trees. They gather together during the winter months in bluffs where food is available. We refer to this as deer "yarding up". In a marshy area or during the winter the deer spreads its weight by using the dew claws on its feet (example shown in drawing).

## THE RING-NECKED PHEASANT

This popular game bird is an "exotic" species, exotic meaning that it was introduced into this country. Pheasants require good food, water and shelter. Sound conservation practices in farming and habitat improvement programs will help maintain and improve this species. Pheasants are polygamous, that is one male mates with more than one hen. During the month of May the males establish crowing territories and the hens select nesting sites. The hen lays ten to twelve eggs in a period of between fifteen to sixteen days. The incubation period is approximately twenty-three days. The young pheasants feed on insects at first but later become seed eaters. Skunks, badgers, ground squirrels, crows and the red fox are the chief predators.

The fact that the male bird mates with more than one female is an important trait in pheasant manage-

ment. Adult males are easily distinguished from the hens and it is therefore possible to have an open hunting season for males only. This allows liberal hunting by sportsmen without affecting the breeding potential for the following spring. Removal of the excess males benefits the pheasant population. Unlike our Sharp-tailed Grouse, the Pheasant has not adapted himself to our winters and has not much ability in finding protection during winter storms. During such storms drifting snow freezes in his nostrils and feathers, causing death.

### COYOTE

The coyote may well be called the wanderer of the plains. It is well known to most persons and is distributed throughout the settled and fringe areas of the province. The

coyote adapts itself readily and lives on both the open plains and the heavily forested areas of the province. A coyote digs its den in some secluded spot where three to eleven young are born. Food is carried to the young until they are able to forage for themselves. The coyote is not a fussy eater and its food consists of small mammals, birds, fruits and even insects. The coyote is also a carrion feeder and farmers sometimes lose poultry and sheep.

**Note:** I would be very pleased to hear from any reader who found this material of interest. It is certainly possible to do a series on this type of material and if there are any species that you wish to have included please write, care of Dr. G. Ledingham, The Blue Jay Editor.

## Big Game News

By W. ARTHUR BENSON

Deer in the mixed wood forests of Central Saskatchewan are, this winter, in dire straits. This condition has primarily been brought about by two factors: (1) The very deep, fluffy snow which has not been seen so generally for about 25 years, and, (2) the very large deer population which was made even larger by virtue of an inclement hunting season which did not harvest sufficient deer. In this northern, fringe-of-settlement area, permits were made available to Conservation Officers which allowed deer to be taken in over-populated areas. So far hunters have not been able to find access to these areas and few permits have been issued. In addition, the Department of Natural Resources has provided transportation for feed bought or given by farmers, Fish and Game Leagues and other interested parties. The feed has been taken to areas where deer are in goodly numbers and are in danger of starvation. So far several deer have died and, depending on the weather, many more might die of starvation. When starvation is the cause of death, it is fairly easy to determine by examining the bone marrow, which, instead of being creamy white (healthy), is varying shades of pink and red (starvation). This red condition of the marrow occurs as stored body

fat in the marrow is used up, leaving only the red blood cells which are produced in the bones.

If the condition of large deer populations in process of starvation occurred in the Lake States or parts of Ontario and Manitoba, sound wildlife management would dictate that no feeding be done and the deer population be drastically reduced. This is because winters there are permanently bad as far as heavy snow is concerned. It is the heavy snow which troubles the deer by reducing their travelling ability. In the Eastern States, deer "yard up" every year, and the peculiar thing about it is that the same "yards" are used every year and no amount of inducement will make the deer move. In Saskatchewan, our winter conditions normally are less severe as far as snow is concerned and for this reason higher deer populations can be allowed without fear of starvation. Once in 30 years or so, we have a situation like this winter in the mixed-wood area of northern Saskatchewan. If we get a series of winters such as this one, we will have to reduce our deer population or the slow killers of starvation and disease will do it for us. We are fortunate in that our southern area and aspen parkland area are seldom critical. This year deer in the south