

culture is that provided by the Prairie Dogs whose cities of underground dwellings once stretched for hundreds of miles across the short-grass plains. Poisoned bait and guns in the hands of cattlemen and others soon cut down the population of millions to a few hundred confined to a small pocket south of Swift Current. No protection is given this tiny remnant so it seems only a matter of time when the prairie dog too will become a thing of the past in Canada. When that time comes, perhaps our neighbors to the south who have given sanctuary to the little animal in their National Parks will be indulgent enough to let us visit their country for a view of something which we ourselves didn't have the foresight to preserve.

In recent years there has come into fashion a doctrine known as wildlife management and with it a lot of glib talk maintaining populations of native species at arbitrary levels as if the numbers of any wild creature could be turned on and off at will. All that is necessary, it is held, is to juggle bag limits from season to season and introduce a few haphazard control measures which wouldn't interfere too much with hunting. Unfortunately the whole matter is not as simple as that. Even under primitive conditions of comparatively stable environment the struggle for life is so bitter that an animal can barely hold its own; it has all the burden it can bear, a trifle more and down it goes.

Any one or a combination of a multitude of disturbing factors that accompany settlement may be the proverbial last straw. The past century has been a score or so of native species pass into oblivion and it is entirely probable that the next will witness an equal number go down the same road and among them will be those that are now being "managed" to provide sport for the gunners. There is a growing feeling that the solution lies in the adoption of a broad conservation program on a national level to regulate the use of water, land, forest, wildlife and other natural resources to meet the expanding economy of the country and satisfy the recreational needs of the people without, at the same time jeopardizing the existence of any wild creature.

BIRDS

M. Brooker,
Grassy Lake, Sask.

Birds are delightful as a woman's hat, unpredictable as the weather, and endearing as no animal can be. Because they are not earth bound, they seem to dwell in a realm of their own that is all happiness, song, and colour.

The first time a Chickadee alighted on my hand to accept a Blue-bottle fly. I was reminded of what my friend had said, years ago, when she cupped in her hand a tiny baby toad that could have sat comfortably on a dime. She said, "I feel like God with the world in the palm of my hand."

Of the five Chickadee's who feed from the upstairs bedroom window, three have learned to eat from the hand. Cupy, Stupy, and Spivlick. The last so named because of that little bit of bird talk "Spivlick" that he repeats insistently. Each bird has its own personality, its own approach. Cupy, alights square in the palm of the hand, looks up with awe at the great face above her, then deliberately turns her tiny tail and begins to eat the fly, while she clings to the finger tips. Stupy first alights on the screen that is hinged up, then does a flip and comes up on the under side of the hand, pears over, then swinging up, she snatches the fly, and flips to the birch tree to eat it. Spivlick snatches his fly on the wing, and rarely alights. And between "Spivlicks" he clicks sharply, spins like a top, and makes a great to do about nothing.

Crooker tail is distrustful, but would like to eat from the hand if he had the courage. So to bolster his ego he bosses all the others. Dee, who wades about in the snow on the outskirts of the feeding platter, is bossed by all, and says only, "Tsee Tsee." In gentle reproach.

At dawn every morning the Chickadee's come to be fed, regardless of the weather. Sometimes bewhiskered with frost, and their feet are cold. But they are always happy, singing, and amazingly durable.