

The Unwelcome Albino

By ARTHUR WARD, Swift Current

Often associations closely linked in a pattern of an accepted standard elicits the expression, "Birds of a feather flock together". Even in the matter of plumage aberration we see that the tendency of the main flock is to resist the inclusion of the albino. It is more often seen behind on in the outer fringe in flight. In the case of an albino sparrow we saw that there was a marked contrast as it flew from a lilac hedge following a small flock of English Sparrows across the street.

The fleeting glance suggested a bird of some other species, until later it was seen flying along behind the others. A slightly mottled feather left behind was one which showed a makeup as lacking in natural colouring matter of the usual plumage. We had hoped to retain this novelty in our district as something of an unusual sight. Even with the faintly mottled feathering in pale ivory this

was a fine example of an albino, and was very conspicuous when seen flying with other sparrows which, we fear, tended to its final disappearance.

We had expected a much larger number of those birds that sometimes stay over winter, but noticed a decrease in this area. About twelve Bohemian Waxwings, one Downy Woodpecker and eight Starlings were observed here. A Meadowlark was reported to have been seen at Shackleton during the third week in January. We saw one male Ringneck Pheasant with the females feeding across the street amongst the shrubbery of a vacant lot. Feed had been placed there for them. It was a fine sight to look out of the window and see them feeding there almost every day. These, we understand, had been raised locally and released. If not molested they may rest along the creek side where there is sufficient color and food.

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By Mrs. T. H. BRAY, McLean
and

Mrs. HILDA NEWTON, Indian Head

The year 1904! A stretch of green prairie, two hills (the settlers' landmark) beside a newly built frame house, fragrant with the smell of pine from the new lumber. Another pioneer, full of hope, was bringing his family home.

The fall before had seen widespread prairie fires; possibly started by trains, travelling relentlessly for miles. They presented a terrifying sight to the settlers, especially at night, resembling a necklace as they swept over the distant hills. The prairie, thus cleansed of its dead grass the fall before, now resembled a vast green lawn, dotted with purple crocuses, later with clusters of blue violets. As the summer advanced the everchanging panorama of colour delighted the eyes of the younger pioneers.

In our many joyous ramblings we came upon many species of wild

flowers that are seldom seen today, such as fringed and bottled gentian dusty pink primroses and shooting star and spicy seneca-root — much sought by the Indians. But outstanding in our memory were the flaming patches of red lillies, encircling the alkaline marshlands in hundreds. (These will also thrive in your garden if given an undisturbed spot). Lady Slippers, too, were plentiful; many having three flowers. These are very scarce today.

To satisfy young appetites were the piquent wild strawberries, found in profusion along with other native berries, such as June-berry, Saskatoons, etc. How we all enjoyed them! They were the only fresh fruit obtainable by the early settlers until fall, when Ontario apples came along in time to fill the threshers' favourite pies.

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completely was the small elk, fawn colored with white spots. When she stood up her whole body seemed on invisible springs. Her eyes looked out friendly and trusting and her ears pricked back and forth. We loved her from the start and called her "Gentle."

In the second stall were two more small moose making up our adopted family.

At first we fed them from a bottle, then gradually weaned them to a large pan, from which they all drank at once. They soon became as tame as calves, but wandered farther afield as time went on.

In the evening when it was feeding time, my father would walk around the yard, and to the edge of our small bluff, calling them by name, "Come Gentle! Come Major! Come Ivan!" Soon we would hear them crashing through the young poplars. The moose with lumbering awkward gait would lope into the yard accompanied by Miss Gentle, who came springing over the grass, head high, ears at the alert and dainty feet scarcely touching the ground.

It was a piece of real strategy, (as well as some athletic prowess), for my father to get to the pan first, pour out the milk and leap aside, before all five flopped down on their knees, in a circle, heads in the pan, rumps high in the air, as in the above picture. It was quite a sight!

They were a real attraction to the whole neighborhood, especially to the children. I recall, one day, at the "little red schoolhouse" the pupils rising spasmodically from their seats, pointing through the window, crying out with fine disregard for the English language "Oh look! look! Camrun's Deers!"

They were spellbound at the way the moose could lift and bend their long legs to step over a fence with "the greatest of ease."

As they grew older they wandered farther. They sometimes stayed away for as long as two or three days but would, eventually, come home. When the moose were fully grown my father sold them to Algonquin Park where, perhaps today, some of their descendants stand and gaze, looking off into the "Far Distance."

It is a debatable point (in justice) whether to capture and place in pro-

tected areas these interesting and lovable wild animals or whether to leave them in their natural state, where some day the hunter's gun will lay the proud monarch of the woods low.

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Winters were so long, everyone eagerly listened for the first bubbling song of the Meadowlark, followed by the haunting sweet music of the Song Sparrow, and the soft chucklings of the Sharp-tailed Grouse on the dancing grounds. This is another sound we miss, for very few Sharptails are seen here now.

We now see species of birds, new to our locality, not having seen them until our province became well settled. These are Bluebirds, Brown Thrashers, Black-billed Cuckoos, Wood Thrushes — mostly residents of treed areas. One bird we have not been able to identify was a constant annoyance during haying time. When we were helping dad with the hay around marshy sloughs, these slate grey birds, similar in shape to a gull, would dive swiftly down, dangerously close to our heads with harsh cries of "Flick it", continuing this till we left — doubtless defending their nests. Will someone tell us what these are please?

In closing we would like to appeal to parents to interest their children in protecting our birds and wild flowers. We hope that future generations will fully realize the enjoyment to be gained by nature observations.

Flooded Out — But Survived

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— all nine of them. We lifted the sticks and leaves down to the original nest, put them in a pail and did some counting. The duck had placed about one-half gallon of leaves and more than nine hundred sticks under the eggs.

I have asked several people if they thought the drake did anything to help carry sticks or leaves or take a turn at keeping the eggs warm. No one, so far, will give him credit for anything. They consider him just a handsome no good husband. What do you think?