

A Bewitching Beauty of the "Bad-Lands"

By ARCHIE BUDD, Swift Current

The so-called "bad-lands" of our southern prairies have a most interesting flora and here are found several species not often seen elsewhere. One of the most beautiful of these is the Evening Star, sometimes called the Gumbo Lily or Showy *Mentzelia*, *Mentzelia decapetala* (Pursh) Urban & Gilg. This is a biennial plant from 6 to 24 inches in height, with rough, grayish green stems and leaves. The leaves are sharply and coarsely toothed, varying from 2 to 6 inches in length, and very rough to the touch. The upper leaves are stalkless while the lower are frequently short stalked.

The flowers are borne at the ends of the branches and when fully open may be well over 3 inches across and appear in June and July. As they only open in the evenings their full beauty is rarely seen; generally they appear with closed flowers, resembling short white candles on a miniature Christmas Tree. They appear to have ten creamy-white petals, only five of which are true petals, the others being petaloid, sterile stamens. In the centre of each flower is a dense cluster of from two to three hundred stamens and the flower has a somewhat cactus-like appearance.

The fruit are capsules about one and a half inches long and half an inch across and open at the top when mature releasing the numerous flat seeds. The seeds of a closely related species, *Mentzelia albicaulis*, were ground and pounded into a kind of cake and eaten by the Indians of Montana and Oregon.

This is the only Saskatchewan species of the Loasa family and is found in the "bad-lands" of the southern part of the Province, particularly near Eastend and the valleys adjoining the Frenchman River, the Big Muddy Lake area, around Roche Percee and also on the clay banks of the South Saskatchewan River near Estuary. Seeing this beautiful plant growing in such wild and deserted locations one is reminded of a portion of Gray's *Elegy*, "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its' sweetness on the desert air." The scientific generic name, *Mentzelia*, is dedicated to a German botanist of the seventeenth century, Christian Mentzel, and the specific name, *decapetala*, signifies its apparent ten petals. By the botanist Greene it was placed into a separate genus, *Nuttallia*, but modern taxonomists retain it in the Linnaean genus of *Mentzelia*.

Flooded Out - But Survived

By ED WILEY, Saltcoats

Now that spring is here, we are looking forward to renewing acquaintances with many of our feathered friends that have spent their rather prolonged winter vacation in the sunny South. It is interesting to look back a few short months and remember the struggle some of them had to reproduce their species under adverse weather conditions.

We had several duck nests under observation but will tell about only one. This mallard had her nest quite near our stable in a bunch of willows on a little island about six feet across. There were nine eggs about half incubated when the rains became more frequent and heavier. The water was

rising and coming nearer and nearer to the eggs.

One duck sensed danger and began to raise her nest by putting twigs, sticks and leaves under the eggs. We were never able to see her working, as she was always on the nest when we went to look. The situation looked hopeless to us. The eggs were very wet and resting on sticks instead of downs.

Eventually the weather became a little nicer. The duck which was getting quite well acquainted with us by this time, got her nest into pretty fair shape again. When the time came, out came the little ducklings

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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.

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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?