

Boys' and Girls' Section

In our last issue it was stated that the essay contest closed with this issue, but that was an error: The boys and girls will still have an opportunity for winning valuable prizes as well as the camera donated by Bird Films. But send the essays in as soon as possible as the **JUBILEE ESSAY CONTEST CLOSSES ON JUNE 30**. A complete list of all those winning the Field Guides since the contest began, the guide they received, and the donor, will be listed in the next issue.

Dick and Ada Bird, of Bird Films Ltd., will then announce the grand winner of the \$50 camera they have donated.

A committee of Judges consisting of Dr. and Mrs. Stuart Houston and Margaret Belcher selected the three following essays as the prize winning ones for this issue. Those donating field guides for this contest are Ralph Stueck, Abernethy, E. Symons, Rocanville and Doug Gilroy, R.R. 2, Regina.

(Will those, not familiar with the contest rules please consult the last issue of the "Blue Jay").

Ruffed Grouse Episode

By Bob Buhr, Mennon, Sask.
Age 14, Grade 8

Last spring a Ruffed Grouse nest was accidentally discovered by my brother when the bird suddenly flew up in front of him. The nest was very expertly concealed at the base of a tree beside a patch of heavily tangled shrubbery consisting mainly of wild rose bushes. It was constructed of dry leaves and bark, being lined with the latter, and contained nine yellowish colored eggs.

After the nest was first discovered I did not find the bird off the nest at any time. I imagine she fed early in the morning. I could walk right up to the bird while she was sitting on the nest and even touch her without her batting an eye. This was an excellent example of wildlife "freezing". It was practically impossible to see her from a few feet away because her markings matched perfectly the surrounding twigs and dry leaves. Although I had the vicinity marked with a pile of stones, often I had to search for a considerable time before I could locate the exact situation of the nest.

Several days after the discovery of the nest I returned to the same place and found the bird still on her bark and dry leaf nest. Only this time, as I neared the nest, the bird, with wings half spread, scuttled away in the underbrush. Immediately fluffy Ruffed Grouse chicks began to spread in every direction from the nest in a wild frenzy. In the nest were left only broken eggshells. I quickly left.

A few hours later I came back to the nest to see if the bird had returned. She had. But this time when I neared the nest, the grouse, instead of scurrying away, rushed right at me only to turn aside at my feet and rush away.

I did not see anything of the Ruffed Grouse until late summer when I again found myself on a hike in the same woods. While wandering through these woods I saw a full-grown grouse with several two-third grown young fly up in front of me and go racketing through the trees. I am positive that these were the birds from the nest as I knew of only one flock of Ruffed Grouse in that particular bush.

Animal Engineers

By Colleen Farrell, Tonkin, Sask.
Age 13, Grade 7

One day last summer my younger brother burst excitedly into the house. "Mom, Dad," he cried, "Look what I found". He held up for our inspection a poplar sapling neatly chiseled to a point at one end. It was undoubtedly beaver handicraft. We immediately plied him with questions. He reported that he had found several poplars cut along the bank of the creek which runs through our farm.

Several beaver lodges had recently been seen in our vicinity, and it had been our hope that some would settle in our creek. Now our wish was fulfilled. We watched the beavers with growing interest that summer.

Before long a large mud lodge had been constructed.

One Sunday afternoon we hiked along the shore of the creek, which is covered with a dense growth of poplar. We were quite amazed at the ingenuity of the beaver's work. White poplars were felled always leaning toward the water. The branches were severed off as neatly as with a saw. In one case a falling tree had caught in a thicket of willows, leaving it angled about fifteen feet above the ground. However, the industrious little "amik", as the Indians called them, had still rid it of its branches. We also noticed that a wide swath had been cleared through the rushes as a canal through which to float their "timber". Now that the ice is frozen we have the opportunity to observe the lodge closely, and what a wonderful piece of engineering it is! The way in which the sticks, mud, rushes and other muskeg material are constructed would put many a carpenter to shame. With the arrival of spring we shall watch with interest our beaver colony, for truly some of Mother Nature's finest sons are these animal engineers.

A Wren Finds a Home

By Lynne Maddaford, Saltcoats, Sask.
Age 12, Grade 7

One morning Mother washed and hung my brother's overalls on the clothes line. That evening she went to the clothes line and found about half a wren's nest in the leg of the overalls. We watched the next day and found that the wrens were putting the twigs in the top of the overalls and they were falling out of the bottom. I went out and tied a string around the bottom of the pant leg.

The wrens built their nest and laid their eggs. There were about seven or eight eggs in the nest. Mother washed the next week and Mr. Wren put twigs in all the overalls hung on the line. He sometimes sat on the line and sang while Mrs. Wren sat on the eggs.

The grass had grown long so the men had cut it with the horses. The line had to be taken down so the wrens and the pants were moved to the wind-charger tower where they raised their young ones.

Ducks in Winter

By Margaret Bawden, Marieval,
Grayson, Sask.

My parents have lived within a few miles of here for over sixty years. Never before have they known ducks to stay here on the Qu'Appelle River. Since the P.F.R.A. dam has been built at Crooked Lake, the river has never frozen right by it.

This was a mild winter and so much water ran out of the lake that the river was open for about two miles down. On February 28th there were about five hundred ducks, three Mud Hens and two Kingfishers still here. It was common to hear the ducks quacking, but although we were told they sometimes fly down the valley to the open water at Round Lake dam, we never saw them flying over the lake.

One of the men here fed them with barley. He cleaned the snow away by the river and kept the grain there for the ducks to eat. After the ducks found it they kept coming back to the place again and again.

When my parents come out here first there were a few lynx around, but none had been seen for over forty-five years. Then on February 23rd, two lynx walked past my sister's home and then across the Cotham school grounds. Doris phoned the teacher and she and the children had a good look at them. Some men went after the animals but although they saw them they never got close enough to shoot. Three days later there were fresh tracks around and again the men went out. They killed one outright, and the other, wounded, climbed a tree and died up there. They had to chop down the tree to get it.

(Editor's note: Isn't it unfortunate that a camera had not been used instead of a gun?)

Albino Pheasant

By Mrs. Creighton Smith,
East Poplar, Sask.

Has anyone ever seen a pure white hen pheasant? I imagine there could be an albino among pheasants. Mr. Wilk Keen, the Sask. Pool Elevator agent at Hart is sure that he saw one in that district within the last two weeks, but is afraid no one will believe him.