

# Adventures of a Phony Naturalist

By ROSE McLAUGHLIN

I am not a true naturalist like most of the contributors to these pages. I like to know the names of the flora and fauna, yes, but not badly enough to dig them out of the black and white pages of the guide books. When the color plates fail me, I just find someone who can tell me the answers. I like the system, because, in addition to the information, it yields a bonus in new friendships.

But once this method failed. We had just come to Indian Head in the fall of '49, a season of unusually brilliant autumnal coloring, and on my walks uptown I frequently took a round-about way in order to admire a ladylike maple of a dainty and diminutive variety which I had never encountered before. Since we had no mutual friend to effect an introduction, some other scheme had to be devised for learning the charmer's name.

My husband suggested that we visit the Arboretum at the forestry farm, and this we did on a perfect Indian summer day, golden and still. The place was at its loveliest — driveways canopied and carpeted with gold, and the trees and hedges surrounding the flower beds a rich gold-tinged green, ideal backdrop for the exultation of color within. Beyond the flower garden lay the picnic grounds, skirted by ornamental trees and shrubs which were the aim and object of our expedition.

There was the eye-catching mountain ash, or rowan tree as it is known in Scotland. It was the bright red berries of the rowan tree that Babbie had pinned in her hair on the day when she charmed the heart out of Barrie's "Little Minister". There were dark red viburnums, lindens with broad leaves of clear gold, clumps of sumac brilliantly crimson in the sunlight, and many an unfamiliar one whose botanical label completely baffled us.

We particularly wanted to know the name of a bush spangled with great bunches of tiny red berries.

"Maybe they're elderberries," hazarded my husband.

"Oh, elderberries that you make wine out of," I exclaimed, feeling that rush of friendliness that prompts one to say, "Oh, I'm glad to meet you; I've heard so much about you!"

But all the marker yielded was a cryptic "Sambucus Racemosa".

We completed the circuit, but nowhere in the bright-foliaged throng could our pretty little maple be found, so we decided to try our luck at the experimental farm. Just as we were leaving, a breath-taking splash of color shone through the evergreens that screened us from the highway. Could this be a clump of the maples we sought? But no, it was identified a moment later as the new combine in the farmyard across the way.

"Sublime to the sordid — that's Saskatchewan every time," muttered my husband.

At the "Ex" as it is referred to locally, we again sought out the ornamental shrubs. The first one we came to stood shoulder high, with russet foliage and single waxen berries. The marker was somewhat overgrown, so I, at great risk to my nylons, and losing my hat and veil en route in a sort of Absalom act, crawled in to read it. It said, "Rosa". I haven't felt so taken in since the time, back in grade twelve, when I made a series of complicated tests to discover that the white substance the chemistry teacher had assigned to me was common salt.

After that we took a good look at the tree first. There were hawthorns and honeysuckles and Siberian crabs. The honeysuckle was labelled "Lonicera", and under it some exasperated soul had scrawled in pencil, "Honeysuckle". One shrub was labelled botanically, and under it in official printing but slightly smaller, like a chummy undertone, was the

word, "Nannyberry". A marker like that really gets you somewhere.

At long last we came upon the little maple we were looking for, its leaves brilliantly scarlet and crimson and orange in the burnished air. Against the sun it looked like a cathedral window. That God should have spoken to Moses from a burn-

ing bush is not the tall tale that some would make it out to be.

The marker said, "Genella, 1896". We stood there looking at it and wishing that we, and all the shifting millions of this rootless machine age, could spend a lifetime in one place, watching a genella maple growing on the lawn.

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## Drying Mushrooms

By E. G. EVASIUK, Q. C.  
Prince Albert, Sask.

We preserve our mushrooms for winter use by canning or freezing them. In canning we sometimes are not so fortunate as some of them spoil.

But if you want to have mushrooms taste "different" try to dry them. If they are dried properly and kept in a dry place they will keep indefinitely and are really delicious.

Ordinarily, you can dry mushrooms out in the sun. First you have to slice them (don't wash) thin and then spread them out on some surface above the ground in order to have a free circulation of air. The surface should be tilted toward the sun. You will be surprised how quickly they will dry.

Last year we hit on a very wet season and drying mushrooms outside was out of the question. We had to resort to artificial means. What we did was to put our mushrooms on a window screen and then suspend our screen immediately over the furnace heat register inside the house. To prevent dissipation of hot air we put pieces of plywood on each side of the screen. This forced the air to go through the screen. As we did not want to heat the rest of the house we shut all other registers and then turned the furnace on. By next morning our mushrooms were dry and ready to store.

## A Wise Mouse

By Wm. E. JASPER, Struan, Sask.

A weasel that we had watched carrying mice from the feed stacks to our woodpile, finally got into the rear of the old barn. One day I noticed him on a shelf just over the back door, where some boxes and tins were kept. A little mouse, not knowing the weasel was around, came out of a knot-hole and sat on the door casement. He was facing away both from the weasel and from the hole. As he sat there, only an inch from the hole, he caught sight of the weasel which had come to the end of the shelf not more than a foot from him.

Now the mouse knew that if he ran the weasel would see him, and one leap would be the end. He seemed to realize too that in turning the weasel might see him and be too fast. So with his eyes watching every movement of the weasel, he started to turn around, but so slowly you could hardly see him move. The weasel seemed to be able to smell him and kept hunting around on the end of the shelf. But when the mouse was quite turned around, "flip" he was gone with a noise that sounded like someone striking the door with a stick. The weasel jumped and ran, and Mr. Mouse was safely down in the wall of the old barn.

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