

Owls

By HUGH McLAUGHLIN

There is a shrill wailing in the still summer night, quite haunting and out of place it seems. Visions of the source seemed to conjure a water bird — long legged and restless — but why would such a bird be active at night? It was finally discovered that the wailing one was a Ground Owl, and that its nocturnal noises were quite in line with owl activities.

They are quite a curiosity, as though mother nature had said "we will make this one different". Other owls are not very noticeable except in flight, while these little sentinels perch on the mound — generally thrown up by a gopher — beside the hole which contains the nest. Quite the determined little birds they are, and one summer they contested quite keenly with the gophers for a choice knoll and the accompanying hole. What went on below ground I do not know. There was evidence of trouble in the nest and only a couple of owls hatched the first clutch. Above ground the gophers would chase them into a short flight, but they never left and eventually the feud simmered and the owls and gophers raised their families 20 ft. apart.

The baby owls sit in a little row and there is much excitement when one of the parents return home to distribute food. They are quite hard to approach and quickly disappear down the hole. The best view I ever had was when on horseback, I could get close, as they were accustomed to grazing animals. As they grow larger (like adolescent children) they seem to be more reluctant to go underground at the first warning of the parents. The retreating heads and scolding parents present quite a family scene.

From now on life is more hazardous — they leave home. An open hole seems an invitation. Once I discovered two that had walked through a small hole in the top of a cistern near their quarters — to a watery death. They apparently like to hunt mice along the roadside. The mice scurrying from one side of the road

to the other, as we often see them at night — by car light, are quite exposed for a few seconds to the owls and that is the only reason I can see for their choice of spot to spend an evening. Thus approaching cars take quite a toll — and flat bodies, belying the appearance of size created by feathers dry into dust:

But some grow up — out of two hatches a summer, and in the colder fall the little family gather again around the ancestral home. They perch together now of course, and fly away instead of retreating underground. Home is the focal point of existence until practically freeze up, when they migrate. The same hole may be occupied several years in a row as family quarters.

Qu'Appelle Valley in July

Mrs. JOHN HUBBARD,
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A spin up No. 47 to the Valley and along No. 47 and the Melville Beach road on the north side of the Valley in mid-July netted some surprises.

On the south hill Bank Swallows were taking advantage of excavating done by the Highway engineers and were busily flying in and out of numerous nests made high up on the clay banks. Never a dull moment there.

Down the hill we were amazed to see the quantity of water still covering fields and pastures. The Qu'Appelle chain has a few more lakes this year.

All along the north side of the Valley the grassy hills were yellow with Prairie Cone-flowers. Millions of the things — we've never seen so many anywhere before. Lots of Black-eyed Suzans but nothing to compare to the Cone-flowers. The road itself had a fringe of white-flowered Morning Glories.

At Melville Beach not only trees were standing in the high water but electric light standards too!