

Children as Naturalists

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In the September 1955 issue of Harper's magazine is an article by Bernard DeVeto entitled "Hell's Half Acre, Mass." It is a poignant plea from a man with metropolitan tastes who none the less believes in the necessity of maintaining areas of our country in their natural condition. He deplores the fact that modern civilization is more and more encroaching upon our natural areas and that so little is being done about it. He sums up the situation in the United States by saying, "For everywhere natural areas, semi-natural areas, and wholesomely disregarded areas in a partially natural state, are being obliterated. The growth of towns, cities and industries is swallowing them up. No end to this process can be imagined, and it is irreversible." This irreversible factor is the important one we have to impress upon our children, so that when they take on the responsibilities of adults, they will have gained an everlasting appreciation of our natural resources and regard them as sacred—something which when once destroyed can never be retrieved.

Regina youth are in a particularly fortunate position for here people with foresight are conserving at least one natural area, the Wascana Waterfowl Park, within our city limits. This is a good example to set for the youth of today who will be the responsible adults of tomorrow.

The underlying purpose of all that we in the natural history educational field are doing with children, is to stimulate them to seek direct contacts with nature. As children acquire knowledge of their natural surroundings their appreciation will grow, and this appreciation will lead to their wise use of our natural resources. Nor is this the only benefit to be derived from a closer contact with nature. By making careful first-hand observations of what they see

they can contribute to our common fund of knowledge. This is equally as important as their becoming conservation-minded. As those of us who work with them know, children make keen factual observations. They have a tendency to observe things with a freshness of vision which we adults are frequently incapable of. This keen sense of observation linked with an active curiosity and an interest in the things around them makes them good naturalists. It is our purpose through the Boys' and Girls' Section in this journal to encourage young people to observe nature at first hand and to experience the thrills of discovery. This will be of personal benefit to the child, his horizons will be widened, his senses awakened, his imagination stimulated and his life as an adult will be enriched through interests developed as a child. Through writing to us these young naturalists will be in a position to benefit others too, including those doing scientific studies. In the process it is difficult to say which comes first or benefits more, the cause of conservation or the development of knowledge, for these aspects of natural history are inseparable and interdependent. That young people can make valuable contributions is beyond any doubt.

Wilfred H. Osgood in his biographical sketch of Ned Hollister, a well-known naturalist, states, "It is not uncommon for naturalists to show their inclinations early in life and they often make real contributions to knowledge while still in their teens." Ned Hollister himself, in his book "Birds of Wisconsin" used some observations, which he made at the age of twelve.

We feel the "Blue Jay" affords an excellent opportunity for young naturalists to express themselves and publish their observations. If these observations are accurate they will add to our fund of scientific knowledge, and through knowledge foster the cause of conservation. You can co-operate with us by drawing the attention of young people to this section of the "Blue Jay."