

BOYS' AND GIRLS' SECTION

Edited by **Joyce Dew**, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



Saskatchewan Government Photo

Two Junior Naturalists examining an abandoned blackbird's nest in Regina Waterfowl Park.

NAME THE BIRD CONTEST WINNERS

This was a difficult contest and only fourteen boys and girls dared enter it. They deserve a special "pat on the back" for trying. Those who entered the contest were as follows: Doug Slimmon, Saskatoon; Roberta Forsaith, Carmichael; Brian Irving, Kelvington; Shirley Anderson, Rocanville; David Grout, Star City; Ricky Sanderson, Regina; Barbara Binnie, Saskatoon; Everett Anderson, Rocanville; Myles Ferrie, Invermay; Ann Marie Horasewich, Eaclesham; Jimmie Tysowski, Mankota; Barbara Beatty, Sturgis; Ricky Robinson, Maryfield; Darlene Swingen, Mankota, all of Saskatchewan.

PRIZE WINNERS were: **Brian Irving**, age 10, Kelvington, Sask., and **Barbara Beatty** of Sturgis, both of whom had one incorrect answer.

The correct answers are as follows: 1, Canada Goose; 2, Short-eared Owl; 3, Common Goldeneye; 4, Eastern Kingbird; 5, Boreal Owl; 6, Sora; 7, Bonaparte's Gull; 8, California Gull; 9, Canada Goose; 10, Sandhill Crane; 11, White-fronted Goose; 12, Whistling Swan; 13, Snow Goose; 14, Common Tern.

LETTER WRITING CONTEST

Rules:

1. Any boy or girl 16 years old and under may enter.
2. Entries must be first hand observation and not something copied from a book or other source.
3. All entries must be accompanied by the name, age and address of the sender.
4. Send entries to Miss Joyce Dew, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, to arrive not later than January 15th.
5. Prizes, which are awarded according to age, include field guides and subscriptions to nature magazines.

Prize Winner: The prize this issue goes to Ricky Sanderson for his careful observations of a Kingfisher's nest. Ricky took care not to disturb the nest unnecessarily in the course of making his observations and he is to be commended for this as well.

Calling All Boys and Girls

Your letters, comments, questions, suggestions, drawings and other observations are welcome at any time.

We look forward to hearing from you.



Photo by Fred G. Bard

Children birdwatching with Joyce Dew in Regina Waterfowl Park.

KINGFISHER OBSERVATIONS

by **Ricky Sanderson**, age 15,
Regina, Sask.

In early June, as I was making a periodic round of the Regina Waterfowl Park, I happened upon an uncommon nest. I was checking for Bank Swallow nests when I found an extra large burrow. It was about five feet up in the bank, three and one-half feet long, three inches high and about three inches wide. At the end of the burrow I could see only one white egg lying on the earth. Being unfamiliar with this type of nest I checked through several reference books and afterwards decided that it was a Belted Kingfisher's home.

It was not until several days later that I was able to see the adult bird. It was sitting on a dead branch carefully watching the water below. I noticed that each time the bird flew away it alighted on the same telephone pole. Only once did I see it dive from its perch ten feet above the water and rise with a small minnow in its long bill.

Upon my next visit to the nest site the parent bird never left the safety of its burrow. I could see it sitting on the eggs looking very worried. This was in late June.

On Dominion Day a quick check revealed a young bird and an egg in sight. Four days later there were a total of four young in the nest. With this check I discovered that someone

had been busy trying to enlarge the entrance of the burrow. No harm had been done to the young birds or the remaining egg, and I could hear the young squawking quite loudly.

During all my visits not once did I see the adult with any type of food, nor did I ever see more than one adult at a time.

Another check on July 6 revealed a tragedy. Two of the young Kingfishers had fallen from their nest and drowned in the shallow water below. Their eyes were not yet open and they had only the slight pinfeather on their wings. A second last check on July 7 revealed another tragedy. Two more babies had fallen into the water and one had drowned. The other one had landed on a chunk of mud and I was able to place it back in the nest, with the fifth baby that had just recently hatched. All was well on July 8 which was my last chance to check on the success of the nest.

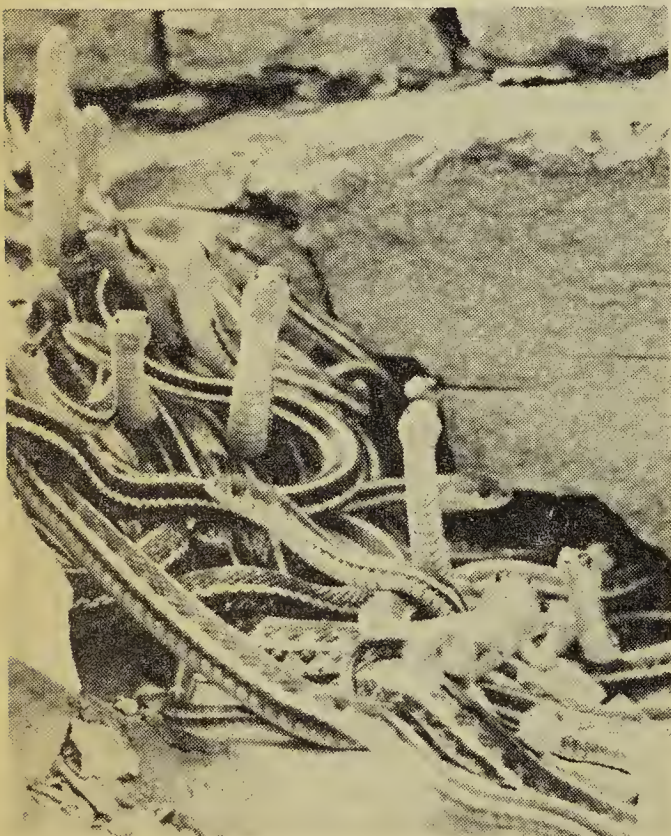
I arrived home August 5 after a long holiday, to find the nest empty. I checked to see what remained and found the remains of three crayfish and some small bones. There were also a few feathers that appeared as though they may have belonged to young birds, indicating that they might have reached the feathered stage.

Unfortunately I can't be sure of the success of the nest but even their attempt to nest here is another first for the Regina Waterfowl Park.

I WAS A BABYSITTER FOR A SNAKE

by Alex Steele, age 13, Regina, Sask.

Last summer my mother was working for the Museum and a boy brought in his Garter Snake to be looked after for two weeks while he was on holidays. My mother brought the snake home to me. It was quite a big snake. I used to take it out on the lawn and the kids would all come over and play with it and watch it. We carried it up and down the street one day and scared all the women with it. My sister was scared of it for a long time but she did pick it up before it left our house. When we were watering the lawn the snake would curl around the tree and soak in the water from the hose. We caught a bunch of minnows at the creek one day and put them in a tub of water and put the snake in with them. He sure enjoyed it. He would swim around about and then out would dart his tongue and then he would eat a minnow. That is about all we could get it to eat. We kept it in the basement in a box. One day it got away and we were scared it had gone down the sewer. However, I finally found it behind a trunk on the floor. The boy came and got his snake when he came back from holidays. Now I have a wee dog called "Midnight" and I am looking after him.



Is he talking about us?

AN UNUSUAL MOTH

by Ralph Underwood, age 13,
Strasbourg, Sask.

One mid-August evening while my brother was walking through our grove of trees he noticed a large moth clinging to a branch. He called me over to see and catch it for my collection of insects.

It had a good four-inch wing span. Its wings were broad at the front narrowing toward the back, and the edges were very irregular. They were mottled brownish-grey in colour, and there was a large irregular light coloured line running parallel with the outer edge of the wing. At the bottom edge of each hind wing was a small dark eye spot. Its antennae were very slender and about one inch long. Its body was dull grey in colour.

When we tried to catch it, it flew to an ash tree. It seemed to prefer to stay in an ash or elm tree. Finally we lost sight of it. It moved its wings very slowly like a butterfly.

I looked it up in "The Field Book of Insects" and found it to be an *Erebus odora*. This moth does not live in Canada but sometimes flies this far north.

ANIMALS OBSERVED NEAR SASKATOON

by Michael Gollop, age 10,
Saskatoon, Sask.

Robbie Tomzack and I saw three or more Franklin's Ground Squirrels near the Canadian National water tower on Clarence Avenue. They were seen on April 27, 1960. I also observed a lone individual on another road near there leading east off Clarence Avenue.

I observed one Hummingbird in a friend's flowers on the 2200 block on York Avenue. I observed this bird on September 3, but could not tell what kind it was.

Robbie Tomzack and I saw quite a few larval salamanders in a small but deep slough right beside where I saw the first Franklin's Ground Squirrels. There were two dozen or more. When I came back with my father we moved a raft from near shore and saw beneath it two adult tiger salamanders. All these salamanders were observed during the month of August.

HAWKS IN THE NEWS



Hawks continue to be in the news. Not only do they have laws passed for their protection but junior members have again written several letters about them.

COOPER'S HAWK NESTS

by **Myles Ferrie**, Invermay, Sask.

Near the middle of May I found a Cooper's Hawk nest near our farm one mile north of Invermay. The nest held three eggs. At this time I was not sure whether it was a Cooper's or a Sharp-shinned Hawk. On May 23, Eddy Shepherd, Graham Thompson, Gary Anweiller, Dr. Stuart Houston, and I were banding owls. I showed him the nest. He told me it was a Cooper's Hawk. He also told me Cooper's Hawks were very rare in this area. I visited it now and then until they were ready to band. When I returned a few days later with the bands they had left the nest.

About this time I had found another Cooper's Hawk nest with one egg. I came back a few days later and found the nest deserted.

I have found four Cooper's Hawks nests in two years with the help of Eddy Shepherd. And believe me, Eddy hasn't all the bad luck that he says he has. One 1959 nest was used twice, the other three were old crow's nests.

OUR PET HAWKS

by **Douglas T. MacFarlane, Jr.**,
age 14, Peebles, Sask.

My brother Donald and I brought two Red-tailed Hawks home when they were young fluffy chicks. We had found the nest before the eggs were hatched and watched regularly until we thought the chicks were big enough to bring home. Young as they were they were still rough and fierce to handle and we had to use gloves to protect ourselves from the sharp, strong claws. We had to force them to eat by stuffing mice and pieces of gophers down their throats but it wasn't long before they started eating by themselves. When we had them about a month we let them out of the cages and found that they were quite tame and happy to stay around the farm. We still had to feed them but the odd time we could see them swooping down on gophers and field mice. We hunted sparrows and mice with our B.B.'s in order to fill their great hunger. I could hold a mouse or sparrow in one hand and they would swoop down and take it out of my hand. Other times I would throw food in the air and they would fly down and catch it in mid-air. After having them about three months they began to fly further and further from the farm hunting food on their own. But they always returned daily. Now they are full grown and gone on their own. I have banded them and maybe some day I will see them again. Who knows, they may come back next year to have another look at their old home.

THE ALBINO SWALLOW

by **Kenneth Underwood**, age 11,
Strasbourg, Sask.

One day in late August my brother and I were coming down from the barn. We noticed a white bird on the power line. When we looked at it through Dad's telescope we found it was a Barn Swallow. It was just about pure white with a slightly yellow throat and a dark eye. We know it was a Barn Swallow because of its song and its deeply-forked tail. The other swallows seemed to be picking on it, but it still flew around with them.

WILD BUMBLE BEES

by **Kenny Tompkins**, age 15; **Kenny Stirrest**, age 12; **Peter Skichan**, age 12, Tisdale, Sask.

We were playing tag with a plastic bowling pin when we accidentally came upon the bees. I was hiding at what turned out to be the entrance of the nest when Peter threw the toy bowling pin at me. The pin flustered the bees and they were furious. I ran away from the nest and got the other two boys to help me investigate the nest. We waited until the bees calmed down a little, then we borrowed a bee-gasser from Barry Pugh and gassed the bees. Then we tore the siding off the garage and took the nest out to look more closely. We decided to see what was in the closed cells of the hive which was a large one. We opened them and found the following stages of bumble bee-larva, pupa, full-grown bee, besides honey and other interesting things. We thought our Natural Resources Conservation Officer would be interested and he was very interested. He took moving pictures of us and suggested that we send our story to the "Blue Jay."

Note: We would like to thank D. W. Pegg, the Conservation Officer, for encouraging the boys to send their story in to us.

SUMMER VACATION BIRD COUNT

by **Barbara Binnie**, age 11, Saskatoon

We left Saskatoon on June 30. Our destination was Cypress Hills. Along the highway between Swift Current and Maple Creek we saw many Lark Buntings.

Arriving at Cypress we found the tall pines and bushy areas around the lake alive with singing birds, many of which we were not able to identify. Among those which we were able to observe closely were a pair of Oregon Juncos building a nest, a Belted Kingfisher feeding its young in a sand bank and a Yellowthroat flitting about in the underbrush near the same sand bank. A pair of Black-capped Chickadees visited our campsite daily.

On our way from Cypress to Katepwa we camped at Moose Jaw

where we saw many Yellow Warblers and several Baltimore Orioles. Arriving at Katepwa we pitched our tent in the midst of a bee-hive of bird life. Both Yellow Warblers and House Wrens were busily feeding young, scolding and calling from early morning until late in the evening. A Least Flycatcher sitting on a nest of four eggs furiously attacked any small bird that came within a few feet of her home. The most colorful bird we saw was an American Redstart.

From Katepwa we travelled to my grandfather's farm near Lumsden, where we saw unusually large numbers of the native sparrows common to that area. While picking saskatoons we found a Clay-colored Sparrow's nest containing four tiny spotted blue eggs. The sighting of a Great Blue Heron was another first for me.

Arriving home we found several unusual birds in our garden. A Black-billed Cuckoo has been seen often. He is now so tame we can observe him at close range. We have also seen a Northern Waterthrush which does not hop like most birds but walks and wags his funny tail. Pine Siskins have been feeding with the Goldfinches on our sunflowers. Uncommon warblers include the Black-and-White and the Wilson's. A Red-breasted Nuthatch worked over the maple trees by our kitchen window.

Keeping a record of all the birds we saw during our travels and at home has made this a most interesting summer for me.

Clues For "NAME THE MAMMAL" Contest

1. These mammals are members of the deer family.
2. The mammal which dug this hole is found in one place only in Canada and that is near Val Marie in Saskatchewan.
3. This mammal is rare in Saskatchewan and is found only in the sand dune region of the southwest.
4. This mouse is named after an insect.
- 5 and 6. These mammals are both rodents.

"NAME THE MAMMAL CONTEST"

- RULES:**
1. Any boy or girl 15 or under may enter.
 2. Put your name, age and address at the top of a sheet of paper and number from 1 to 6.
 3. Clues to help you find the correct answer are found elsewhere in this section.
 4. Boys and girls 12 and over must write a paragraph of not more than 50 words about one of the mammals telling about its value to us.
 5. Send entries to: Miss Joyce Dew, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, to arrive not later than January 15.



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2.



3.



4.



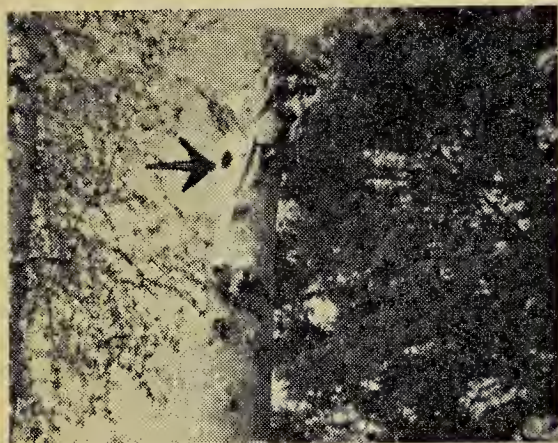
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REPORT FROM URANIUM CITY

by Pat Kerr, age 15, Gunnar Mines,
Uranium City.



Yellow-shafted Flicker's nest (see arrow).

The following letter was received by Dr. Nero after his visit to Uranium City this summer. It was dated Oct. 19.

"I am enclosing a picture of a flicker's nest on Dome Lake. We have had our first snow and I saw a flock of six ptarmigan fly past our school this afternoon. After you left this summer myself and several others saw some small (about 6 inches long) type of bat. I may send some more

photos later on. If there are any samples of birds or mammals from this area, I will try to get them for you if you will let me know."

TAXIDERMY EXPERIMENT

by Jack Zess, Moose Jaw

Yesterday before school Jimmy Baily, a neighbour of ours, came to the door and asked for me. I went to the door. He had a dead sparrow in his hand and wanted to know what kind it was. I got my book and found it to be a Lincoln's Sparrow. Immediately I decided to try my hand at taxidermy. I got the chemicals and went to work. It didn't turn out too badly. Seeing that they are not supposed to live here I thought I'd let you know.



TAME DUCK

by Ernest Skaar, age 10, Hagen.

Insect Classification and National Collection of Insects

by G. P. Holland, Director, Entomology Research Institute, Ottawa

Editor's Note: The following item is part of a mimeographed article distributed on June 16, 1960, by Dr. Holland. We are pleased to print it because it stresses the importance of obtaining proper identification of specimens. If you would like to write about insects for the *Blue Jay* you should first get identification from your local Entomological Research Institute, e.g., Saskatoon (University sub post office) which houses part of the C.N.C. of insects. What is said here in support of proper identification of insects is true also for plants and other animals.

The scientific name of an insect is the key to all the information recorded for that species. Thus, a starting point in any problem in entomology is correct identification of the insect or insects involved. This is important because insects differ, physically and physiologically; each species has certain characteristics and limitations that determine its distribution, numbers, and habits. No two species are precisely alike in these respects. To use existing literature effectively, then, an investigator must know which species he is working with and, similarly, his own publications will carry little weight if he

does not specify the insect (or other organisms) that were involved in the experiments or observations reported.

The classifying of insects is a science in itself and is known as insect taxonomy or systematics; individuals trained in this field are called taxonomists or systematists.

The main concentration of insect taxonomists in Canada is in the Taxonomy Section of the Entomology Research Institute in Ottawa. There are more than twenty such officers in the Institute. Assisted by a number of technicians, they make identifications and conduct original researches on insect classification.

Their main working tools are the Entomology Library and the Canadian National Collection of Insects. The Collection includes preserved specimens of insects, mites, and spiders; each specimen is specially prepared and labelled with locality, habitat and other data. The Collection is maintained in special cabinets in a manner planned to ensure its safe