

# Junior Naturalists

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



Canada Goose, drawn from museum exhibit by Richard Albright, age 10, Regina.

## BEST LETTER

Due to the small number of entries and the difficulty in selecting one which was noticeably better than the others we are awarding no prizes this issue. Perhaps if the Junior Naturalists really exert themselves we will give two prizes for letters in the March issue. Let us hear about your winter adventures with nature.

## LETTER WRITING CONTEST

Any boy or girl 16 years old and under may enter. Entries must be first-hand observations and not something copied from a book or other source. All entries must be accompanied by the name, age and address of the sender. Send entries to Miss Joyce Dew, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, to arrive not later than January 15. Prizes which are awarded according to age include books on natural history and **Blue Jay** magazine subscriptions.

## MY OWN NATURE MUSEUM

by **Gary Adams**, age 12, Saskatoon

I have been interested for many years in nature so whenever I can I get small items for a museum I've made. I've quite a collection now but I'm never satisfied. This year I've tried very hard to get things. In late spring I got some birds nests (unused) and my favorites are my redwinged blackbird's with natural surroundings of grass on which it was held, and a meadowlark's with eggshells in. On a hike a little while ago I got a snakeskin shed by a garter snake near Beaver Creek. By a beaver dam I found a small chip of chewed wood. In southern Saskatchewan about August I got some petrified fish.\* Other things in my collection are petrified clams, bone and sea coral.

But it shall never be finished for I just got some glass and I'm planning an insect case for my insects. Also as soon as winter comes I want to make some plaster casts of tracks.

\*EDITOR'S NOTE: We suspect that the "petrified fish" which Gary has found is not a fish at all but a straight ammonite.

## JUNIOR NEWS



### THE MOURNING CLOAK BUTTERFLY

by **Ralph Underwood**, age 14,  
Strasbourg

The Mourning Cloak Butterfly, *Aglais antiopa*, is one of the first butterflies to be seen in the spring.

It is dark brownish maroon in color. On the outside edge of each wing is a yellow irregular shaped border extending the full length of each wing. In the dark portion of each wing, near the yellow band, is a row of brilliant blue spots.

The underside of the butterfly is black, flecked with dark brown lines. The border on the underside is white, heavily flecked with black. When the butterfly is at rest, with its wings folded together, it very closely resembles a dead leaf.

Near the abdomen on the hind or lower wings are long silken hairs. There is also a depression in each lower wing for the abdomen.

The butterfly in the photo is a mounted specimen with a wing span  $3\frac{3}{8}$  inches, but the average wing span is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Ralph didn't mention whether he collected and mounted the butterfly himself but knowing his interest in insects we suspect that he did.

Ralph reports that this is one of the first butterflies to be seen in the spring. Here's something Junior Naturalists might like to do—keep a record of first appearances among the butterflies.

The Mourning Cloak is a good one to watch for, since it appears early and is so well described by Ralph that you will be able to recognize it.

Junior Naturalists from out of town had an opportunity to meet those from Regina at the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society in Regina. Some got up at 7:30 a.m. to go birding with the adults. We were pleased to see some of these attending the business meeting while others, particularly the younger ones, chose to take part in a special program consisting of a tour of the museum, a contest based on the exhibits in the museum and drawing from museum exhibits for those interested.

**Brian Irving** from Kelvington, one of our regular contributors, has done his share of bird watching this summer. He sent a list of 41 birds which he saw in his yard. We wonder how many Juniors are keeping lists like this. You can add to their value by noting after each bird the date when first seen in the district, last seen, nest record if any, and status—common or uncommon. Do this for several years and you will begin to get the picture of bird life in your community.

**Pat Earnshaw** of Hudson Bay, not to be outdone by Brian Irving, sent in a 1961 spring migration list. The first on his list is the Horned Lark, March 16, and the last is the Black-and-white Warbler on June 21. We wonder if Pat and Brian write to each other, they seem to share a common interest.

How many Juniors would like to correspond with other Juniors and exchange news of your nature activities? If you want a pen pal let us know.

**Jack Gowndes** of Kelvington tells us that even though he hasn't as yet entered any of our contests he would like to see them continued. Any other Juniors feel the same way?

Your editor will be pleased to hear from you regarding your nature activities, what kind of contests you would like or whether or not you are looking for a pen pal. Write to **Joyce Dew**, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, Sask.



Goshawk, by Lorne Groupe, Hagen.

## NEW FINDINGS

by **Keith Harper**, age 16,  
Pleasantdale

This summer I have found birds and mammals around the Pleasantdale District that I never knew existed here. In mid July while picking Saskatoons I saw a jumping mouse. I saw one of these animals at Pike Lake but did not know they lived here.

Last week a flock of redstarts on their southern migration passed through our farm. I have never seen these birds before but my mother recalls seeing them here one spring many years ago. Two days ago my greatest surprise came when a neighbor of ours reported that two moose passed in front of his combine just at nightfall. This is the first time I have heard of moose in this district.

Near the end of June a neighbor notified me of a dead white pelican on the shore of a lake nearby. The pelican had no noticeable wounds. It was a very large bird with a wing span of six feet. Many times I have observed pelicans wheeling about the sky but I did not know that they ever alighted on sloughs. The findings I have made this summer have greatly increased my knowledge of these species.

## THE CATBIRD NEST

by **Brian Irving**, Kelvington

On July second while walking past a lilac bush I noticed some grass and string hanging in the branches of the bush. I suspected a bird was building a nest. I did not know what kind of bird it would be.

On July third you could see the form of the nest. While I was looking at it I heard a scream in the background. Turning around to see what had made the noise I saw a Catbird sitting in a nearby tree. So then I knew who was building the nest.

On July fifth the female bird was sitting on the nest but flew off when I approached. The nest contained two bluish-green eggs.

On July ninth, July thirteenth and July seventeenth it was the same story, except there were three eggs.

On July twenty-first three little baby birds were in the nest. The parents weren't seen. When I was near the nest the babies opened their mouths. When their mouths were open they looked like they were all mouth.

On July twenty-fifth the babies had their tail and wing feathers.

On July thirtieth the young were flying around in the bush.

## WEASEL'S FIGHT WITH A GOPHER

by **Bohdan Pylypec**, age 11  
Yellow Creek

Weasels are fierce fighters. They attack animals bigger than they are. One day this summer I saw a weasel fighting a gopher. As I came upon the two creatures unexpectedly, they were fighting fiercely. I came closer and saw the weasel choking the gopher. Then the gopher tore out of its grasp. Again the weasel caught the gopher. This time the gopher shrieked in pain, twisted and jumped. After a hard struggle it lay on the ground and looked dead.

I took a better look to see if it really was dead. As I moved closer the weasel was frightened and jumped on a rock. The gopher seeing its chance to escape, ran away as fast as it could.

I retreated back to my former place. Watching the weasel again, I noticed it was sniffing the ground strangely, probably tracking the gopher. In the end the weasel most likely did get to feast on his delayed dinner.

## BIRD OBSERVATIONS

by **Bill Fleming**, Regina, Sask.

We were scanning the trees around the marsh in Regina for hawks and owls and had observed nothing. Upon closer observation of a certain huge ash tree we saw on a branch sawed off close to the tree, a Great Horned Owl sitting perfectly still. The bird was perfectly camouflaged by the motley color of his feathers. The bird was asleep which allowed us to walk right up under it and look for pellets, of which we found two or three. We were able to steal quietly away without disturbing him.

While counting the nests of the Common Tern this summer we came across some strange nests (which later were found to be avocets).

While counting the number of eggs the angry terns wheeling overhead slowly came lower and lower, until they finally started attacking us. We found that the only protection from this was to wave a handkerchief in the air. The terns seeing the handkerchief checked their dive and veered off to the side. Soon we found that they became used to this and we beat a hasty retreat for dry land. This incident proved that a bird will often do fantastic things to protect its nest and eggs.

## A TOAD

by **Rachel Niniowski**, age 6,  
Calder

One hot day last July we went to the garden to pick carrots. The soil was hot and dry. Mother called us to see something she had found. We saw some brown skin level with the soil. It looked much like the soil only it moved. Mother dug it out and there was a large toad. It hopped away.

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# The Garter Snake - A Nature Lesson

by **Pearl Guest**, Regina

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** We are including the following story by Pearl Guest, one of our adult members, in the Junior Naturalists section because of its appeal to our younger members. Stories like this will help overcome the unreasoning fear and disgust which many people feel for such harmless and fascinating creatures as the Garter Snake.

Exploring a dry creek bed, I came to a pool of water. The pond was so still that its surface mirrored back the flaming tree on the farther side, a splash of crimson against a backdrop of white clouds and blue sky. Bordering the near shore, willows crowded to the water's brink to bend over their own reflections, and in that autumn air the only sound and movement was the faint breaking of painted leaves that slipped away from their parent branches to drift waywardly down upon the quiet waters.

In reality, I stood in a golden arbour, with the newly minted gold of the aspens above shading to the massed old-gold leaves that carpeted the ground. What can one do at such an hour except stand silent before the

manifestation of perfect though evanescent beauty, and sense underneath and through it all the oneness and interdependence of living things.

Gradually a new sound was borne upon the air, the chatter of children's voices. Soon two little girls appeared and as they came towards me, I saw that they were guarding a captive—one of Nature's little children. Noting my look of interest, they approached me with the frank friendship of childhood. "We caught a gartersnake. And we're going to have his picture tooked."

At my offer to tell them a story, they released the little fellow into my hands. Slowly he "smelled" his way through my fingers and curled around my wrist while I explained that his sensitive velvety forked