

MIXED SPECIES ASSOCIATIONS OF WHITE-TAILED AND MULE DEER IN SASKATCHEWAN

by **Richard S. Miller**, Department of Biology, University of Saskatchewan

Last October, about 10 miles north of Carrot River, I and two companions saw five antlerless deer feeding in an open meadow just off the road we were driving on. Disturbed by our car the deer fled as a group into the bush, crossing the road in plain view about 50 yards in front of the car. Four were White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) and one a Mule Deer (*O. hemonius*). They were easily identifiable by their external characters and by the way they moved, but they fed as a group and fled as a group until they reached the bush. At the edge of the

trees, the Mule Deer typically stopped in the open for a last look before entering cover, while the White-tails entered the trees and then stopped.

Both species are known to occur together in many parts of the province and there is ample opportunity for this type of association to occur. It is, nevertheless, unusual for these two species to show this kind of mixed species behaviour. The author would be interested to learn of other observations of Mule Deer and White-tailed Deer associations in Saskatchewan.

The Plains Grizzly

Success story in Wildlife Conservation

by **Stephanie Stewart**, Moose Jaw

We are so frequently confronted with evidence of man's destructiveness and lack of forethought in the use of his natural surroundings and those who preach conservation so often feel themselves to be voices "crying in the wilderness" that it was encouraging to come across the story of an effort to preserve what remains of a once mighty race in Western American wildlife—that fabled giant the Plains Grizzly (*Ursus horribilis horribilis*).

Great credit is due the Alberta Government, the oil industry (whose seismic crews first penetrated what proved to be the grizzly's last stronghold) and particularly to Mr. Albert Oeming of Edmonton, for preserving and protecting what remains of the great Plains Grizzlies, until recently thought to have succumbed to man's encroachment upon its natural domain.

The buffalo that once roamed the western plains no longer exist free in nature; they live in national parks, managed as a curiosity and tourist attraction, but at least they have been saved from extinction and can perpetuate their kind. Until recently it was thought that the great Plains Grizzly had not been so fortunate, but in 1935 Bella Twin, an Indian woman working her trapline in the wilderness of northern Alberta, shot a bear. There was nothing remarkable in this except that the bear was later estimated to have weighed half a ton, and Bella Twin (who was interested in beaver, and to whom the bear was merely incidental) shot it with a .22 rifle. It took her eight shots. Bella Twin skinned the bear, and two weeks later presented it along with her beaver belts at the village of Slave Lake, and here the bear skin aroused no little curiosity. It particularly aroused the curiosity of Rheinhold Eben, top guide and hunter of the district, who securing directions from Bella managed to locate the skull, and measuring it,

found it a colossal 16 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches from nose tip to base, and 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches across the head. The Boone and Crocket Club of New York, arbiters of world hunting records, declared it the **BIGGEST GRIZZLY ON RECORD.**

And then, as people will, people began to remember. Loggers, trappers, foresters and those whose daily business took them into the wilderness domain where this giant had been shot remembered paw marks of remarkable size, a few remembered kills measuring from eight to ten feet, and nearly everyone remembered a homesteader's pet bear cub that had grown so large it had been shipped off to the Calgary Zoo. "Fisherman's tales," memories gilded by passing time, freaks of nature... Mr. Albert Oeming of Edmonton didn't think so. Mr. Oeming, as early as 1946, as a student of zoology in New York, had heard rumours of a giant race of grizzlies in Alberta's Swan Hills. He searched for them and finally saw one in 1950. He was patiently gathering measurements of paw marks, scraps of skulls and reports of sightings when Bella Twin shot her bear. He knew the bears were there and that they were enormous.

Here was a mystery. What were these bears? Why were they so big? Where had they come from? Mr. Oeming dug deep into his reference books and found... the "plains grizzly." Early explorers of the western plains had recorded "big bears" roaming the prairies often along the fringes of buffalo herds; prior to 1850 as many as 600 bearskins a year had been shipped out of Fort Walsh in southern Saskatchewan. These were not the Rocky Mountain Grizzly, they were larger, varying in colour from chocolate to silver-brown, and had long needle-sharp claws. They had been extinct for 65 years. The Swan Hills grizzlies matched their description

Historical proof exists that buffalo ranged as far north as the Peace River, and if as the early explorers reported, grizzly and buffalo often had been found together perhaps some of the Plains Grizzlies had accompanied the buffalo herds in

their retreat. Mr. Oeming thought so. He believed that thus they had found their way into the remote Swan Hills, primeval and inaccessible, and there had lived and multiplied unmolested.

But even this fortress was now faced with assault. Caterpillars and bulldozers clanked their inexorable way into the grizzlies' secret stronghold in search of oil. The roads advanced, the grizzlies retreated, more bears were seen, more bears were shot, and Mr. Oeming, hot in pursuit of his theory, wanted to get a look at a live Swan Hills bear. He devised a trap of steel culvert pipe baited with raw beef and with an end gate triggered from the bait... and so caught a bear. To examine and ear tag the bear it had to be tranquilized with liquid ether, and Mr. Oeming found that it took quite a lot!

Such goings-on could not pass unnoticed... they aroused the interest of the oil-drilling crews... Mr. Oeming was only too willing to tell the story of the bears... he made not only friends but allies... they scouted for him, providing an ever increasing fund of information... they relocated their camp garbage dumps, some camps even banned rifles. Mr. Oeming is on record as stating, "The co-operation of the oil industry was terrific." People of some influence became interested in the matter and later the Alberta Government placed the entire Swan Hills district off-limits to all bear hunters.

The great Plains Grizzly is not extinct as once was thought. He is known, and now protected. And if one thing stands out from this record it is this. It was knowledge that saved the Plains Grizzly, knowledge and curiosity and enthusiasm. If Mr. Oeming and his fellow enthusiasts had been content to write off the mysterious bears of the Swan Hills as "just big bears" they could now be vanished for ever, only seven years after Bella Twin went out to check her trapline.

NOTE: Material for this article was largely derived from the story by Jim Bowes in the *Imperial Oil Review* of September, 1959, which is here gratefully acknowledged.