

BLUE JAY CHATTER

Let's Start a Wildlife Refuge

As the **Blue Jay** goes to press the prospects for many forms of wildlife on the prairies look grim. Because the ground was dry last fall the snow soaked away leaving the sloughs dry or very nearly so. Farmers everywhere will be tempted to break their low spots.

Having protested against government-assisted drainage of important wetlands, we are happy to see that the Saskatchewan Government has passed a Bill during this session recognizing the rights of recreation and wildlife in the use of water. We hope that this means that every effort will be made to conserve water and wetlands. Another hopeful sign lies in recent statements by the Honourable A. Hamilton, Minister of the Canada Department of Agriculture, suggesting that the federal government will actively help in providing for our migratory birds.

Yet I think that we naturalists must show that we really want to conserve our wildlife and want refuges for their use. The gravity of the situation is indicated by a statement made on November 10, 1960, by a prominent Canadian Wildlife biologist: "Figures that I have seen indicate that the Big Duck Factory will have all of its duck-producing areas drained or earth-filled in 25 years. There will no longer be a harvestable crop of ducks."

Alarmed at this situation, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists at its 1961 annual meeting urged the Ontario Government to make an immediate survey of the wetlands of southern Ontario. On the prairies in spite of the large expenditures made by Ducks Unlimited the situation must be considered very serious since the United States Government is setting aside funds from the sale of "duck stamps" (see back cover) for the possible purchase of marshlands in Canada.

What are we doing in Canada? Perhaps the only people who are really doing anything now are the farmers who recognize the importance of each little bluff and pothole and retain them on their land as the kind of habitat that encourages wildlife. What about the rest of us? Chances are, if you ask your neighbour, he will only be able to reply, "Well, I don't hunt, but I bought an American duck stamp." So we send our money to the States to buy lands for wildlife in the States, and perhaps some of it may be sent back to buy lands in Canada!

What further action can we take in Canada? Could we have a wildlife stamp, with proceeds to go only to the purchase of lands for wildlife, issued each year? In the States the stamp costs three dollars and every waterfowl hunter must buy one. Perhaps ours could sell for a dollar as the American stamp did when introduced 28 years ago. Sale of stamps in the States to non-hunters is steadily on the increase, and we are sure that many non-hunting Canadians would like to see more land available for wildlife. To inaugurate a Canadian wildlife stamp let's write individually to the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Ottawa, and to our M.P. requesting a program for the purchase and development of lands of refuges.

Another approach is for groups of interested people, like our Society, to buy land as the beginning of a refuge program. We know of lands in areas vital to wildlife, where farmer's crops are suffering depredation, which are available for purchase. We could acquire some of this as a pilot project and use lure crops to help keep wildlife from nearby farms. This land could be turned over to the Provincial Government as soon as the latter is ready to sponsor refuges. Let us see how much land we can buy.

Send a donation of one dollar, or five or ten dollars, or as much as you can, to the Special Refuge Fund, c/o The Editor, 2335 Athol Street, Regina. Mark your cheque clearly as "refuge donation" for this special project, and come prepared to discuss the whole project at the June meeting, June 16.

GEORGE F. LEDINGHAM.