

BLUE JAY CHATTER

Who has seen a coyote recently? This question comes to mind each time one sees an item in the daily press or in a farm magazine about the increase in mice—the coyote's favourite food—with thousands of acres of unthreshed grain in our fields. Two Canadian Press items that I read in the **Leader-Post** actually raised the question of the relation between the growing numbers of mice and our programme of coyote control ("Coyotes raise dilemma," Dec. 12, 1959; "Mice eat into grain in swaths," Jan. 9, 1960).

There has been an upsurge in the mouse population in many places; for example, the outbreak of mice in the Clouston area near Prince Albert, reported by the Searle Grain Company. We agree with D. A. Gilliland of the Wheat Pool that mice are bound to increase when grain is left in the fields but we do not agree with him when he says, "as far as we know, there is nothing that can be done to remedy the situation."

I believe that in Saskatchewan something is being done to ensure that there will not be too much crop damage from mice when exceptional weather conditions prevent the harvesting of the grain crop. In this province there is a growing appreciation of the value of hawks and owls. I'm sure that members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society have been partly responsible for the change in attitude. It is interesting, for instance, to read in this issue of the **Blue Jay**, Mr. Law's first-hand account of how the Great Gray Owl catches mice. A more tolerant attitude and an appreciation of the role that hawks and owls play in controlling such population outbreaks as the present increase in mice will lead, we hope, to the enacting of legislation giving complete protection to all hawks and owls. A pertinent little item in this issue (p. 16) tells of the role played by the Great Horned Owl in keeping the Magpie population in check.

The Saskatchewan Fish and Game League has done much to create a better understanding of the value of predators. At their annual meeting in 1959 they discussed resolutions seeking protection for coyotes and weasels as well as hawks and owls. There are of course times when an individual predator will cause trouble and loss to the stock- or poultryman, but generally speaking such loss is almost insignificant in comparison to the good which predators do. We are coming more and more to recognize the function of predators in maintaining a healthy wildlife community, both by cropping weak animals and by cropping surpluses. In certain localities, for example, deer have recently increased, partly because of lack of natural predators, to the point where they are actually doing damage to crops and the season has to be extended to control them.

The recognition that hawks and owls are beginning to get in this regard will, I believe, eventually extend to predators like the coyote. Even farmers who pressed for a rigorous coyote control programme are now asking whether this action was altogether wise. Certainly control has been so effective that the coyote population is now very low. Time was when you could go out and hear the coyotes almost any evening, and when you frequently saw them going about their business in the fields. If you were lucky, you sometimes saw a coyote intently creeping forward with ears up, making a quick jump, landing with all four feet close together, and then the nose going down between the paws to bring up a mouse. During 1959 I saw only one coyote and I miss them. Farmers, believe me, this animal is your friend—do not allow anyone to kill all the coyotes in your district. We should learn from the experience of others—in the state of Colorado the coyote is now fully protected by law.