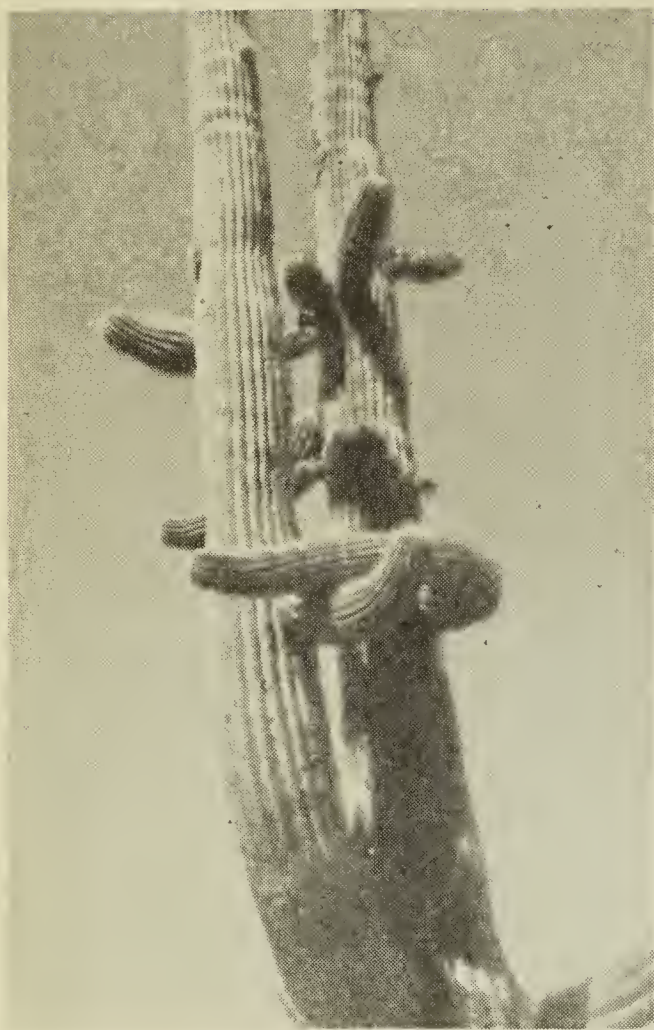


BLUE JAY CHATTER



Saguaro by Mrs. R. E. Swain

The saguaro, *Cereus giganteus*, is a giant cactus conspicuous in the Sonoran Desert of southern Arizona and northern Mexico. It grows to heights of nearly 30 feet and may be as much as 18 inches in diameter. Every Canadian travelling to Arizona, as Mrs. R. E. Swain has done, has brought home pictures of this important desert dominant.

The saguaro (pronounced sa-war'-o) has been used as a nest site by woodpeckers and owls and it may be gnawed or eaten by a few mammals, apparently mostly for moisture, but surely it is immune to tourist pressure. It would seem that a park in the Sonoran Desert would ensure its future and allow millions of people to visit it and marvel at its adaptations to its harsh environment.

Listening to the thought-provoking address of Mr. R. York Edwards at our annual meeting (page 134), in which he explained that some things can be enjoyed without damage while other beauties of nature are soon destroyed by the big feet of people, one could not but think of his own special nature spots. I thought, for instance, of the saguaro.

Having once seen and marvelled at the saguaro I would think it almost indestructible, yet conservationists have, since 1880, been worried about the future of this giant cactus. Although larger plants may produce as many as 400,000 seeds, few of these grow into mature plants. Even if the seeds fall in locations where they can germinate they may be washed out, eaten by rodents, or frozen. Growth in early years is slow. It takes a plant 10 years to reach a height of one inch and 20-50 years to reach a height of three feet. Mature plants may reach an age of 200 years but they may be killed by frost, by bacterial necrosis or from washing out of roots.

Environmental extremes, however, do not affect the reproduction and survival of the saguaro as much as man's intrusion, as is pointed out by W. A. Niering *et al* in *Science*, 142:15-23, October 4, 1963.

The many cattle brought into the Sonoran Desert following 1880 resulted in serious overgrazing, erosion, and lowering of water tables. There was little or no reproduction of the saguaro especially on finer soils in overgrazed areas. The saguaro is, therefore, likely to disappear except on ungrazed slopes of desert mountains or in undisturbed paloverde-bursage desert. The splendid saguaro forest which the famous Saguaro National Monument near Tucson was created to preserve is much deteriorated and much effort will be required to prevent further deterioration.

If even the giant saguaro needs protection against man and his domestic animals and if the park near Tucson has not been effective in ensuring its future, then we must carefully examine the needs of all of our native plants and animals to see what their chances of survival are. The welfare of all our wildlife, not just the game species, is the concern of all people and we must see that more money and much more effort are expended on their behalf.

G. F. Ledingham.