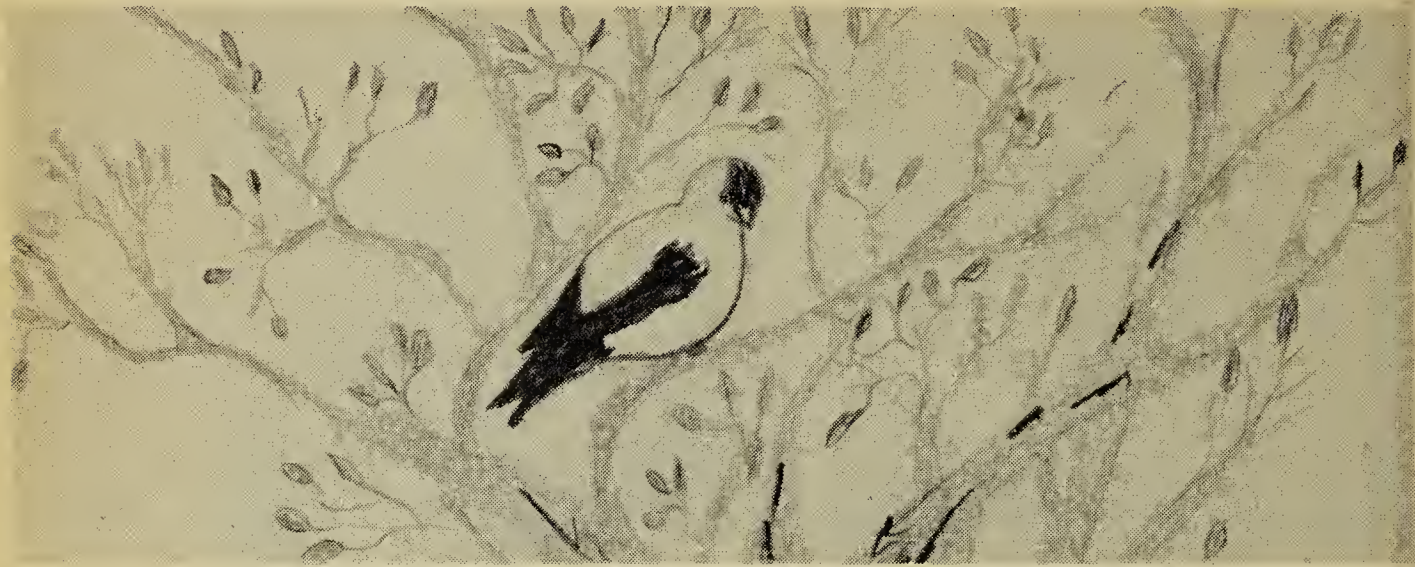


# Boys' and Girls' Section

edited by **Joyce Dew**, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina



GOLDFINCH, by Doreen Kovalyk, age 14, Springside, Sask.

## Comments and Prize Winners

Keith Winstone from England writes about his experiences raising silk worms. This is the first letter we have had that tells about insects and I hope it will encourage some of you to observe these interesting animals. Try raising some of our local insects. Caterpillars can be kept quite easily if you feed them the same kind of leaves or plant that they were eating when captured. They can be kept in a glass jar with a top which will permit air to enter, for example a screen. Why not make a collection of insect eggs and see how many different kinds you can collect? They will probably hatch out in a day or so, then you can watch them feed and grow.

Murray Thompson tells how he set up a bird feeding station and what birds came to feed from it. Once your bird feeding station is set up try to get to know some of the individual birds which come to it and observe their actions. Sometimes male and female look alike but their actions are quite different. Try to learn to tell them apart by their behavior as well as by their appearance. Keith and Murray are the prize winners for this issue.

## CONTEST RULES

Any young person may submit material for printing in this section of *Blue Jay*. The entries must be first-hand observation in the form of letters, stories, poems, black-and-white sketches or photographs. Letters and stories

should not exceed 500 words. All entries must be accompanied by the name, age and address of the sender, and the name of his or her school.

Two or more book prizes will be awarded with each issue of the *Blue Jay*. Teachers who send in entries from their pupils may also qualify for a prize. Winners will be sent a list of books from which to select their prize. Send in your nature observations and share your experiences with others. Entries should be addressed to Boys' and Girls' Section, *Blue Jay*, 2335 Athol Street, Regina. The closing date for the next issue is July 15, 1958.

## Feeding The Winter Birds

by **Murray Thompson**, age 9,  
Box 299, Naicam, Sask.

The day before Christmas I set up a little spruce tree in the window box outside our kitchen window. We tied pieces of suet on the little tree and sprinkled bread crumbs along the window-box.

It was not long before several Chickadees came to eat our suet and crumbs.

After a while a Downy Woodpecker came zooming toward our window but he was too afraid to eat. It took him about three weeks to get over his fear. Now he comes three times a day for his suet, and is not one bit afraid of us. He doesn't eat any crumbs. He and the Chickadees are quite friendly with each other, and eat together.

Downy's tail is rough and untidy because he balances on it while he eats.

## Raising Silkworms

by **Keith Winstone**, London England

I have been receiving the "Blue Jay" for several months, sent to me by an uncle in Edmonton, and enjoy reading it very much. I thought you might like to know of my experiences in keeping silkworms.

I received the eggs from Lullingstone Silk Farm and we hatched them out at school. The eggs, about 40 to 50 in all, were no bigger than the head of a pin. We hatched them out on the top of a heater, at about 70-75 degrees F., and we were successful in our class, in hatching about 40. When I first saw the worms they were no longer than a quarter of an inch and looked like black threads of material. We fed them on ordinary lettuce at first but changed to mulberry leaves, which we found to be much better. It was my job to feed and clean them out and to look after them. In about one and a half weeks they were about an inch in length. Also they shed their skin. This I was told is due to their size. The more they eat the fatter they grow and they soon shed their skin. This was done in a marvelous way, as even their mandibles, eyes and feet were shed along with their skin. They did this four or five times.

When holidays started I brought them home. They were then about an inch and a half long with 13 white body segments. The last segment had a yellow spike on it and I could find no apparent reason for it. They grew rapidly until when almost three inches in length their skins began to grow almost transparent, like a grape.

Soon after this the spinning began. I made several paper cones and placed them inside. First they spun a figure eight, then the main cocoon began.

The cocoon was shaped like a peanut, and it took about twenty-

four hours to make. When they had all finished spinning I unwound the cone and picked the cocoons from them. Then I placed them in neat rows in a chocolate box and sent them to the Lullingstone Silk Farm.

If I had not done this, the chrysalids would have completed their change and would have issued from special glands in their head, a substance that would rot the silk so it could break out, making the silk useless to spin. At Lullingstone, where the silk for the Queen's wedding garment was made, they spun it for me and sent the finished raw silk to me, with a letter saying that it was first class silk, 20-22 denier.

NOTE: Keith enclosed a few strands of silk spun by his own worms.

## Weasel Observations

**Lyndon Reeve**, Grade 8,  
Oakshela, Sask.

One bright sunny day as I walked through the small trees where there were a great many Bush Rabbits, I saw a small white flash right in front of my feet. After a few minutes of looking around I saw a small hole in the soft snow. Going farther I saw more small holes in the snow and a few moments later I saw the smallest weasel I have ever laid my eyes on. It was about four inches long from head to the tip of its tail. The little fellow ran when he saw me, right into a small soft snow bank making a hole the same as I had seen back further. A few minutes later there were four or five little weasels running across the white snow leaving little tracks in it. Then I saw a larger weasel. I wonder if the larger weasel was those little fellow's mother?

NOTE: It is unlikely that there would be young weasels at the time of the year when snow is on the ground. Probably the smaller weasels were the Least Weasel and the larger one was the Common Weasel or Long-tailed Weasel. Members of the weasel family are known to chase other members of the same family. For example, the Martin chases the Fisher. What Lyndon saw, then, may have been a chase.

## A Chase

Carolina Kotulski, age 15  
Edgewood School.

One rather cold winter evening, almost a year ago to be exact, I set out to check on the cattle. My trail lay along the edge of thick clumps of black poplar trees, and across a stubble field, and spaces of prairie where the snow was deep and hard to walk through. When I had passed a few clumps of black poplars a deer sprang out, pursued by a coyote. I watched them until they were out of sight, then continued on my way. I hadn't gone very far when the deer and the coyote again crossed my path. What I couldn't understand was that the deer was very tired and the froth dripped from its mouth, while the coyote wasn't even running too hard. I don't know the outcome of the chase but very puzzled I went on my way.

My question wasn't answered for a number of weeks but then one day a friend came down. We started talking on the subject of deer and my question was soon answered. He started to tell us about a chase he had seen.

One day while he was riding after cows down in the Pipestone, he saw a coyote flush a deer out of the bush and start to chase it. This man was on higher ground and was able to see all that went on below.

All frightened animals will run in circles and this deer was no exception. The coyotes knew this also. There were two of them and they knew their work. One would chase the deer, while the other concealed itself. When the deer came this far, the concealed coyote would take up the chase while the other coyote cut across country and waited for the deer which continued to run in a circle. Eventually the deer played out and the coyotes closed in for the kill.

**NOTE:** The statement that all frightened animals run in circles is rather sweeping and very difficult to prove. It is known that some animals when chased will run in circles. This could be explained in part by the fact that they prefer to run in territory which is familiar to them. Another explanation of the deer's behaviour could be that the coyotes are chasing it in such a way that it cannot very easily avoid going in circles. Carolina was quite observant to notice the difference in condition of the two animals as she describes them in the first paragraph.



JUNCO by Eugene Stauffer, age 10,  
153 Tupper Avenue, Yorkton.

## Bird Observations

Philip Keller, age 14,  
Wilkie, Saskatchewan.

One day two of my friends and I went out on a hike. Going through a huge clump of trees we noticed a large nest high in one of the trees. So we decided to climb up and see what was in the nest. We were completely surprised to find three duck eggs in the nest. We took the eggs and decided to take them home, put the egg under a hen and hatch them. We also decided to raise the ducklings. On our way home we went through the same clump of trees and decided to take one more look at the nest. We were surprised when we looked in the nest and saw a duck sitting in it. This happened about two years ago.

**NOTE:** The duck's nest which Philip found in a tree was probably that of a Mallard duck. Mallards are known to nest occasionally in an abandoned crow's or hawk's nest. We print this note because Philip's is an unusual observation. Perhaps Philip would have learned more, however, by watching the duck hatch her eggs under natural conditions than by taking the egg home to hatch under a hen.

## FREE

You may obtain your Field Check-list of Saskatchewan Birds and your Prairie Nest Record Cards by writing to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina. If you are interested in birds you should use these free cards.

## Extracts From Letters

**Harry Wolf** of Arran, Saskatchewan, writes about some robins he observed while they were bringing up their young. "The baby robins didn't have feathers on them yet. Mr. and Mrs. Robin were busy carrying insects and fruit. They would keep watch and take turns carrying food. In this way they gave protection. The babies were soon falling out of their nest and they were putting on feathers. One day I came and the young robins were flying. Mr. and Mrs. Robin made their second nest in the tree."

**Stanley Pawliw**, Springside, Saskatchewan, thinks that coyotes are suspicious of men. As he tells it, "I have seen a coyote come up to my tracks and make a big leap over them and keep running for about ten rods. Still others will follow your tracks." Stanley goes on to say that the scent of skunk "is very sufficient" to attract coyotes and that he has noticed that coyotes travel parallel to sand ridges.

**Cheryl Jensen**, Broadview, Saskatchewan, writes "In an old shed close to our house a very teasing squirrel resides. I say teasing, because he teases our dogs dreadfully by chattering and scampering madly around on the roof. The poor dogs sit their barking endlessly. Sometimes, the dogs completely ignore the squirrel; nevertheless, the scamp chatters all day."

## Salamanders Make Interesting Pets

by **Joyce Dew**,

Museum of Natural History

Have you ever found a lizard-like animal crawling over the damp ground after a rain? If you pick this animal up and examine it closely you will find that its skin is moist and shiny and its toes soft and clawless. This animal, although sometimes mistaken for a lizard because it is shaped like one, is a salamander. Salamanders are commonly found in damp places, underneath logs and in cellars. One salamander that I know of was even drowned out of a gopher hole, much to the surprise of the small boy with the water pail!

**Brian James**, Broadview, Saskatchewan, tells about a feeding station he made. "I made a little bird house, took off one side and put some rendered fat in it. In a few days the Chickadees were so tame that all I had to do to catch them was to put food in my hand. They would come and sit on my hand and eat the food."



CEDAR WAXWINGS

Agnes Dobryden, Sanford, Manitoba.

Salamanders, along with frogs and toads, are amphibians. Most amphibians must live close to the water and spend part of their lives in it. That is why they are called amphibians—animals that live both in water and on the land. Most amphibians lay their eggs in water and the young when hatched spend the first part of their lives there. As adults, most of them are found living on land but still keeping quite close to the water.

You are probably familiar with tadpoles, the young of frogs and toads, but how many of you have seen young salamanders? Young salamanders like the young of many other animals are called larvae. The larval salamanders have external gills. These you can see quite plainly as three long finger-like projections on



Sketch by Joyce Dew

SALAMANDER, on left, gills being absorbed, on right, gills completely absorbed.

each side of the head. There are fine black gill rakers extending down from them. Otherwise the larva looks somewhat like the adult—it is long and slender, has a tail and sprawls along or swims with its short legs.

We had two six inch salamander larvae brought to the Museum last winter. They were found in a dug-out near Marquis when they swam to the surface where a hole had been cut in the ice. Shortly after being brought to the Museum their gills started to disappear gradually; they were being absorbed into the salamander's body. The adult salamander unlike the adult frog and toad does not lose its tail when it becomes an adult. It sometimes happens that some salamander larvae do not develop into the land form; they spend their entire life in water where they eventually breed. Such salamanders, known as Axolotls, grow the same size as the adult form, but never lose their gills.

The salamanders which we have at the Museum are Tiger Salamanders, one of our most common species. The adult which grows from 6 to 13 inches is usually dark green in color

with short yellow bars on its back. Underneath it is a pale greenish yellow or grey in color.

Salamander larvae can be kept under observation in a jar containing water. The adults can easily be kept as pets if you remember that even when full grown they must have water to swim in and dry ground too. A large wooden box with moss or dirt on the floor and a pan with water sunk into it will provide comfortable surroundings for your salamander. A screen cover over the top or a piece of glass if the air is dry will keep the salamander in and the cat out. Feed the salamander earthworms or any insects you can find. Sometimes salamanders can be persuaded to eat raw meat if you dangle a strip in front of them. You might like to try growing some of the plants found near ponds and marshes in with your salamanders.

Let us hear about your experiences raising salamanders.

NOTE: A mimeographed booklet "How to Conduct a Nature Study Group" is available from the Museum. It includes instruction on keeping small animals for pets as well as various other activities which can be carried out by a group interested in Nature Study.