

Interesting Observations of a Deer

by A. J. Hruska, Gerald, Sask

Have you ever seen a deer rubbing its knees (hocks) together? Perhaps very few of you have, as deer are very shy creatures. It is only after they have become used to your being near them that they will perform some of their antics in your sight.

Two winters ago I observed these actions of a White-tailed Deer almost daily. That winter the deer were starving but this one made himself quite at home at my straw stack and oat granary. After hauling the manure out in the morning I would proceed to the oat straw stack for straw. Almost every day I would find the big deer bedded down in the dry straw. Sometimes the deer would leap five or six feet to get to the top of the straw cut I was using. At first, when I approached the stack the deer would leave. As I came to the stack daily, he became tamer. Finally, I could drive right up to the stack and stop before he got off the straw. After coming off the stack he would walk over to the granary for his oats. If there wasn't enough on the ground he would lick at the crack and make the oats run out.

After breakfast, the deer would climb up on the big snowbank and watch me pitching straw. Then, having satisfied his curiosity, he would saunter off about 150-200 feet. There he would perform his antics. At this point he would buckle up slightly, put his hind feet together and start to tramp, rubbing his hocks together. This lasted about two or three minutes. His actions reminded me of a turkey tom during breeding season, but they did not seem to be of the same order. After tramping

in this fashion for a time he would lift his right hind leg and lick the inside of his left hock. This action reminded me of cattle licking their lousy spots. Sometimes this antic was repeated a few steps further on. Then the animal would saunter off to the valley and join the other starving deer.

Now what conclusions can we reach? The deer wasn't voiding and this was performed at the granary. It's not likely to be sexual behaviour. An examination of the hock of a deer will reveal that on the inside is a large triangular patch of stiff bristly hair. If you work your fingers in this area and smell the exudation you will find that it has an agreeable odor of pine. So, the only conclusion we can arrive at is that the deer was cleaning out his "ears". Anybody agree?

NOTE: Olfactory signals probably play an important role in the lives of wild animals but their function is little understood. Scent glands are well known in mammals and are located in dozens of different places in different species. The metatarsal gland described by Hruska is present in both sexes in both species of deer. In the White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) the actual gland is about one inch in length; the Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) the gland is about five inches long. One would hesitate to say without further knowledge whether the normal behaviour whether the action described above was an instinctive behaviour to help distribute the scent material or whether it was simply a response to an irritation produced by excessive secretion of the gland suggested by Hruska. It may well be both.

Mr. Hruska's report is a good example of careful observation and recording. Even, if we do not know the exact nature of the phenomenon, the published observation remains a permanent record which can be studied and which contributes to our further knowledge of a wild animal. The material published in the *Blue Jay* is not only of interest to us now but will continue to be of interest as long as people are interested in natural history. Today's information is tomorrow's knowledge. R.W.N.

Further Record of Raccoon in Saskatchewan

by Stanley M. Durr, Bromhead, Sask.

This winter I trapped a raccoon on the creek here (Long Creek). My father homesteaded here in 1903 and says it is the first he had ever seen in these parts.

Additional Gray Squirrel Information

by Robert W. Nero,
Sask Museum of Nat. Hist.

The Museum has received a Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) from W. Brownlee, Rose Valley (about 30 miles south of Tisdale). This squirrel was reportedly killed in March, 195

in a hen house. This record and previous records for Strasbourg and Saskatoon (see **Blue Jay**, 16: 33-35) are believed to represent introduced animals, the normal range of the Gray Squirrel being far to the southeast. Some indication of the possibility of further records has just been received from Ralph Stueck, Abernethy. He reports that three captive Gray Squirrels (obtained from Ontario) escaped during the winter from his home.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The list of references used in the article by R. W. Nero on the Gray squirrel (*Blue Jay*, 16:33-35) was inadvertently omitted in the last issue. Literature cited for that article included:

- ANDERSON, R. M., 1946.—Catalogue of Canadian Recent Mammals. Nat. Mus. Can. Bull. No. 102.
- DE VOS, A., R. H. MANVILLE and R. G. VANGELDER. 1956.—Introduced mammals and their influence on native biota. *Zoologica* 41:163-194.
- HIBBARD, E. A. 1956.—Range and spread of the Gray and Fox Squirrels in North Dakota. *Journ. Mamm.*, 37:525-531.

“Gophers”

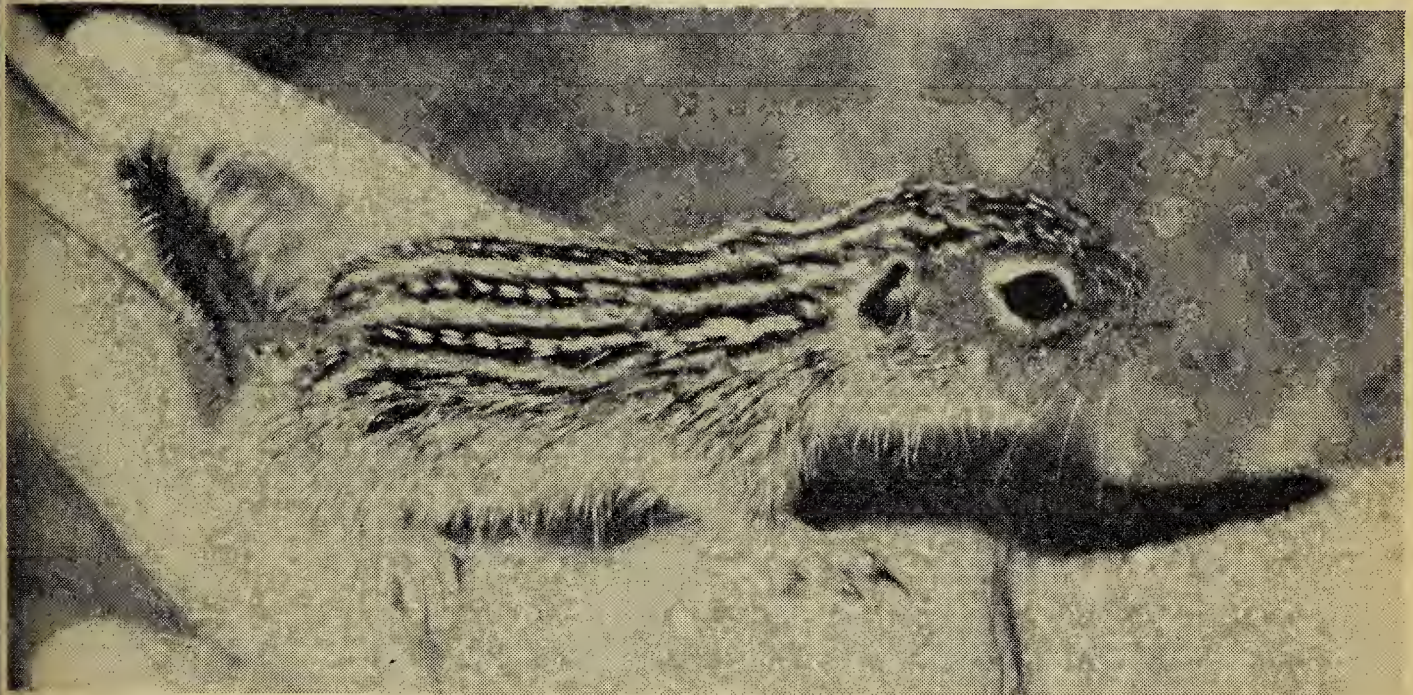


Photo by Doug Gilroy

THIRTEEN-LINED GROUND SQUIRREL

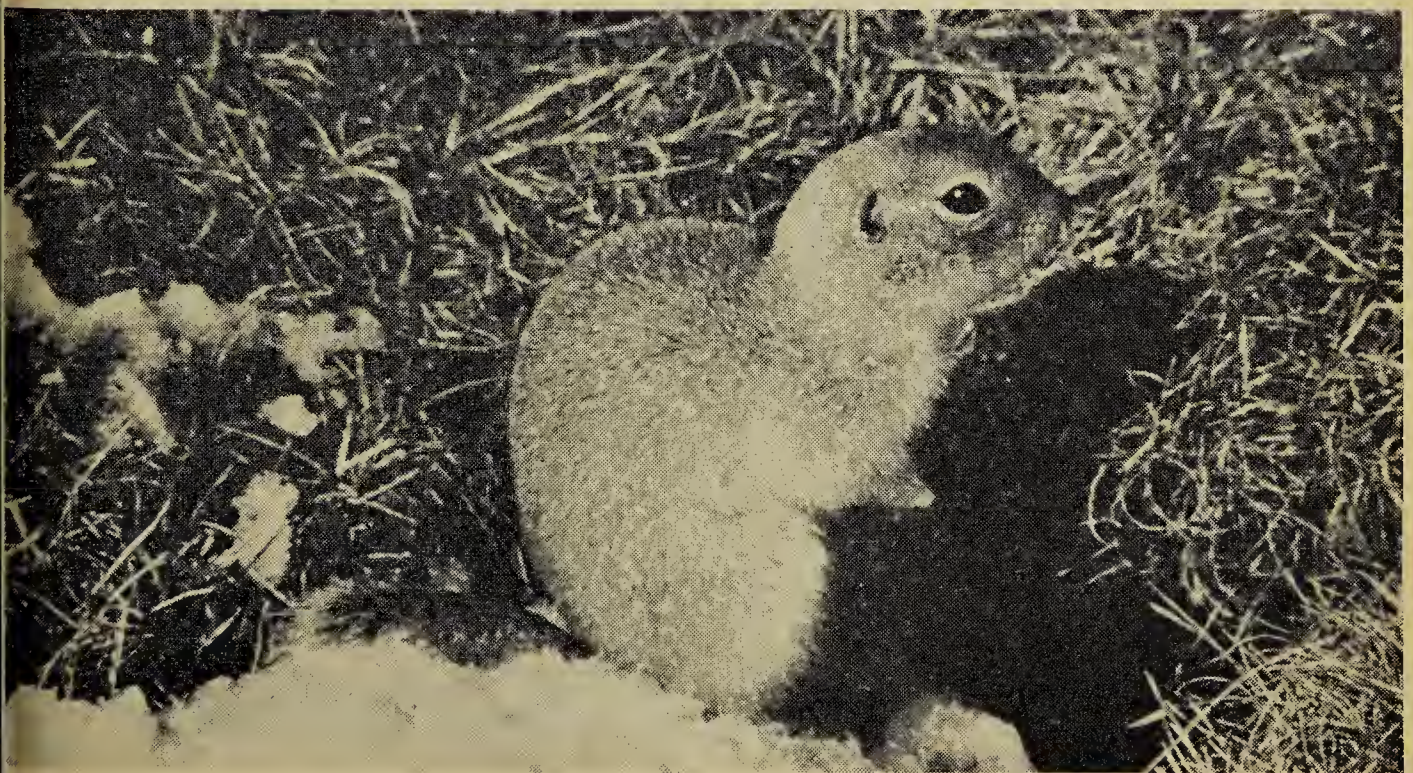


Photo by Doug Gilroy

RICHARDSON'S GROUND SQUIRREL