

BLUE JAY CHATTER

One of the main features in the March issue of the **Blue Jay** is the summary of the Christmas Bird Count. Although it can be extremely arduous, participation in the Bird Count may be regarded as a most interesting "sport." One can easily understand, therefore, why each year more and more people undertake to make a Christmas Bird Count.

Perhaps our readers do not all know how the continent-wide Christmas Bird Count originated. In the December, 1957 issue of **Carnegie Magazine** Stanley Crawford tells the history of the count. "In the latter year of the nineteenth century it was a sporting custom to go out into the field during Christmas week and shoot to death as many birds as possible, especially "vermin" hawks and crows. This pastime was called the Christmas Hunt. To offset this heartless slaughter of birds, Frank Chapman, noted ornithologist with the American Museum of Natural History in New York organized the Audubon Christmas Bird Census or Count in 1899. Its purpose was to observe and accurately name as many species of birds as possible in one day during the Christmas holidays . . . The first count took place in 1900, when 27 observers in Brooklyn reported 25 species."

The Christmas Bird Count is now an annual and popular event throughout the United States and Canada. It has done much to interest people in birds and to counteract the desire to destroy birds which is, unfortunately, still too prevalent. This winter in the local press we have been distressed to see several letters and statements urging the destruction of birds. In Northern Saskatchewan two branches of the Saskatchewan Fish and Game League are enlisting children in their campaign to rid the Garden River area of owls, hawks, crows and magpies in order to establish pheasants there. We realize that predators are a problem wherever game birds are being raised or introduced. However, we do not like to see children asked to compete with each other in destroying these birds. For one thing, there will be indiscriminate killing since points in the contest are offered for the legs of any hawk or owl. Some of these species are actually on the protected list. Not only is this practice liable to reduce the population of the rare species of hawks and owls but it makes it more difficult for young people to develop respect for living things. An example of what destructive attitudes can lead to occurred this winter in Moose Jaw where 25 Bohemian Waxwings were found dead, apparently shot by boys with bows and arrows.

We are sorry to hear of the death of Arthur Ward at 82. Mr. Ward was a pioneer of the Cutbank community southeast of Swift Current, was an active ornithologist and bird bander. Readers of the **Blue Jay** will not forget Mr. Ward, and will be glad to hear that his thirteen-year old grandson, Stan Ward, who wrote to us recently from Saskatoon, is hoping to develop his "grandfather's interest in birds starting with taking pictures and later in banding." It is a fitting tribute to his grandfather that Stan Ward is already learning to appreciate nature.

Another long-time member of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society who recently passed away is Mrs. Albert Mudiman. As a tribute to his wife's interest in children and in natural history, Mr. Mudiman is giving memorial **Blue Jay** subscriptions to the four intermediate classes taught by his wife. I know that **Blue Jay** readers will want to join me in expressing our sympathy to Mrs. Ward and Mr. Mudiman in their bereavement. I know, too, that you would want me to send sympathy to Mr. Maurice Strelnik, Nipawin, whose wife died November 25, 1957 and to Mrs. W. K. Cruickshank, Regina, whose husband died on January 22, 1958.