

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

Edited by **Joyce Dew**, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History



Alan Wade (left) and Bob Clements (right) and Caesar Augustus II.

CONTEST — SPRING OBSERVATIONS

- Rules:** (1) Any boy or girl 16 or under may enter. Entries will be judged according to age.
- (2) Send contest entries to: Miss Joyce Dew, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, Sask., to arrive not later than April 15. Sign your entry with your name, age and address.
- (3) Make a chart similar to the following: Some examples of what you might put down are shown:

Date	Name or Description	Place	Where Seen (Habitat)	Other Observations
Mar. 1	Horned Lark	Regina	Near Roadside	Flying in air, singing.
Mar. 2	Horned Lark	Regina	Stubble Field	A flock of about 20
Apr. 10	Pussy Willows	Regina	Along roadside	yellow pollen on catkins
Apr. 30	Frogs	Regina	heard in ditch	sounded like several.

This is just a suggestion. What we want are your observations of birds, mammals, insects and other animals, as well as plants as you first see them in the spring.

This is **not** a contest to see who can get the longest list or who has seen the bird the earliest. We are interested in what you note down or observe about habits and habitat (where the animal or plant lives). Use your own ideas. You do not need to use the same kind of chart we have shown here. Make up one of your own to suit your own needs.

NEWS FROM JUNIOR MEMBERS AND CONTEST WINNERS

Junior Members are to be congratulated for the excellent job they have done of reporting their activities and observations.

We would like to remind the boys and girls who send in drawings to the **Blue Jay**, that they should be of birds you have seen and know well, so that even if you have to look at pictures of the bird to help you with your drawing, you can still add something to it of your own. We are always pleased to get observations of the bird along with your drawing. You will note that Bohdan Pylpec has done this. We think his observations on the Chickadee are particularly well done.

One of our new members asked if anyone could join the Junior Naturalists. Most certainly! All you have to do is send in a letter, poem or drawing about some of your nature observations.

We are sorry we couldn't include the poem Gloria Tommila sent in, in this issue, but will hold it over for publishing at a later date.

We are awarding the prize this issue to the three boys who wrote about their winter camping experiences. This is a well written account of an unusual experience in this country and the boys are to be congratulated for managing to survive as well as for their account of their experiences.

AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES IN SASKATCHEWAN

by Alan Wade, age 14, Regina

Editor's Note: The following is an extract from a 15 minute talk given by Alan Wade to the Regina Natural History Society. Alan described and showed slides of Saskatchewan's reptiles and amphibians.

"On May 21, 1961, while canoeing in the vicinity of Craven on the out-flow stream from Last Mountain Lake, I witnessed a Plains Garter Snake swallowing an adult Tiger Salamander. The snake, with a part of its tail missing, would probably have exceeded 30 inches in length. I captured the snake and it is now in the collection of the National Museum.

"The Wood Frog, a medium sized frog, is found in the Boreal Forest and the Parkland zones, but is largely absent from the Grasslands. Here is a frog which can change colors from almost a black to a very light color. Two Wood Frogs I captured north of La Ronge and now have alive in a terrarium, show this ability to change color very nicely.

"The Western Painted Turtle is a strong swimmer. It suns itself on logs, projecting objects, or open sloping banks next to water. It is very wary, as I discovered this spring in trying to capture some on the Qu'Appelle River, and will dive or slide off long before you can get close.

"Several years ago a large Bull Snake was captured alive in the Big Muddy by Dr. Nero and Joyce Dew. I now want to show you Caesar Augustus the Second who resided for a few years at the Museum and was viewed by many thousands of people. This famous snake, which is almost six feet in length, now lives at the Wade household and is visited frequently by neighborhood and other children and adults.

The Bull Snake, because it consumes many rodents, especially "gophers", rats and mice, is a great friend of the farmer. Bull Snakes should be given full benefit of protection wherever found.

"Mr. J. J. Deck, who has written on snakes for the **Blue Jay**, in a recent letter to me described some of his adventures with rattlesnakes. I quote one paragraph from his letter:

'I myself did not dislike the snakes, in fact I liked them. They,

like every other living creature here in our part of the world do not look for trouble, and if trouble (like me for instance) came their way, they tried their level best to get out of the way and only took a stand to fight when they got cornered . . . I even know of some farmers that would not let any be killed on their farms because they kept down the gopher, mouse and rat population.'

"Perhaps some of you may wonder why I am interested in amphibians and reptiles and how I got started. Perhaps my curiosity was aroused early by a huge Loggerhead Turtle I discovered on a South Carolina beach. Or, maybe my interest increased when I held a large eight-foot Indigo Snake at the famous Ross Allen reptile exhibit in Florida."

REPORT FROM BRANDON JR. BIRD WATCHING CLUB

by John Nicol, Brandon

This spring the Brandon Junior Bird Watching Club set up a number of nests as a club project. The results were as follows: Tree Swallows (64), House Wrens (18), House Sparrows (7), Flickers (1), Starling (1), Vacant (28), Stolen (2), Total 121.

One duck nest was put out but it was inhabited by a wren family.

A GOLDEN EAGLE

by Douglas Young, age 12,
Shaunavon

On my bird count I saw a Golden Eagle. In the spring my friend and I went to see if we could locate it again. We drove to the White Mud River. Scanning the cliffs through the binoculars we spotted it sitting on a crag. We drove closer and the eagle flew away. We approached cautiously and discovered the nest which was about twenty-five feet up the cliff.

The nest was constructed of branches and was about eight feet long, three feet wide and nine feet deep. On it was one eaglet. I didn't make any sound as we approached. It was covered with blackish feathers with white spots. Its wing span was about three feet.

All the while we were there we kept an anxious eye on the Western sky for the return of the mother bird.

A WINTER CAMP ON BOGGY CREEK

by Alan Wade, Jack Wessel and
Bob Clements

Arrangements for an over-night winter camping trip were worked out according to expected weather conditions — temperature, wind and snow.

On December 23, we made a trip to Boggy Creek on the Gilroy farm to scout out a location for our camp. A good site, about one half mile from the farm, had an ample supply of dead wood available and was protected somewhat from the wind. We started a woodpile.

After several trip postponements, we decided during the evening of December 29 to go out the next day. In the morning it didn't take long to get the car loaded and within an hour we were at the camp site. We hauled sleeping bags, food, cooking equipment, axe, saw and several tarpaulins on a sled and a toboggan. We worked from 10 in the morning until 4 that afternoon gathering wood, taking time out to cook lunch. Then we worked on a three-sided shelter, 12 by 9 feet by 5 feet high, making a roof and floor out of the tarps. Small tarps formed walls, which we had intended to bank with snow.

We all slept inside a double sleeping bag and were kept warm by a fire reflected back into the shelter by a three-foot wall of snow. About every two hours during the night some one had to feed the fire.

In the morning Mr. Gilroy came down to visit and take some photographs. We must have smelled pretty smoky to him.

We managed to have three hot meals and did dishes twice (a third time, at home). We went on one midnight trip along the creek. Deer tracks were plentiful, but we didn't see the Horned Owl we'd spotted the week before. Although one member of the party was convinced there were wolves, it was only the Gilroys' dog barking. A Chickadee sat a few feet above us and watched us eat breakfast.

After testing some of the deeply drifted hillsides along the valley for coasting, we decided to pack up. A call on the Gilroy phone soon got our transportation out from Regina.

Then after a pleasant visit and some hot drinks at the Gilroys, we were on our way back to town.

We were glad we had gone on a "winter" camping trip, even though the temperature did go more than ten below, and we felt quite cold in the morning. We found that we could survive in reasonable comfort, provided we could get protection from the wind and have plenty of firewood.

SURPRISE

by Michael Gollop, age 11, Saskatoon

On October 29, 1961, my parents and I drove up to Borden Bridge on the North Saskatchewan River to look for migrating hawks. We found a good height of land from which we could see for several miles up and down the river. Below us as we arrived were two adult Bald Eagles perched on a tree. One Mallard took off from the river after a few minutes. Slate-colored Juncoes and a Blue Jay made frequent flights to a near-by granary. In a few minutes 13 big Canada Geese flew over the river. Two deer came to drink on a sandbar. Three Tree Sparrows were seen feeding at the granary. Hawk-wise our trip was a real success. Our total for our afternoon's effort was: 3 Bald Eagles, 2 Marsh Hawks, 1 Rough-legged Hawk, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, and 8 Buteos. The big thrill of the afternoon was the sighting of a Steller's Jay. The jay landed on a fence post not 100 yards from the car. Our first impression was that it was a second Blue Jay. Closer inspection proved otherwise. The bird was a deep blue, the lower back being extremely dark. The head had a large thin crest. The bird was lacking the wingbars of the Blue Jay. In all, this was a truly successful afternoon.



Painting by William P. Saban,
age 13, Kelvington

A MANITOBA WINTER

by **Gloria Tommila**, age 10,
Elma, Manitoba

Now in the middle of our cold Manitoba winter, a great number of birds come each day to the feeding station in our yard.

The most colourful are the Blue Jays. They are so bossy and greedy. They seem to take more than all the other birds put together. They fill their beaks then fly off to a bush nearby and fly back for more. I suppose they are hiding food for a future "rainy day".

The wee little Chickadees are so tame I can walk up to them and almost "put salt on their tails". They prefer fat meat to any other food.

A very attractive group of Evening Grosbeaks come around now and then. They eat the seeds of our maple trees and honeysuckle bushes. They are very wasteful and never go down to the ground to pick up the seeds they drop. It will serve them right if they go hungry some day.

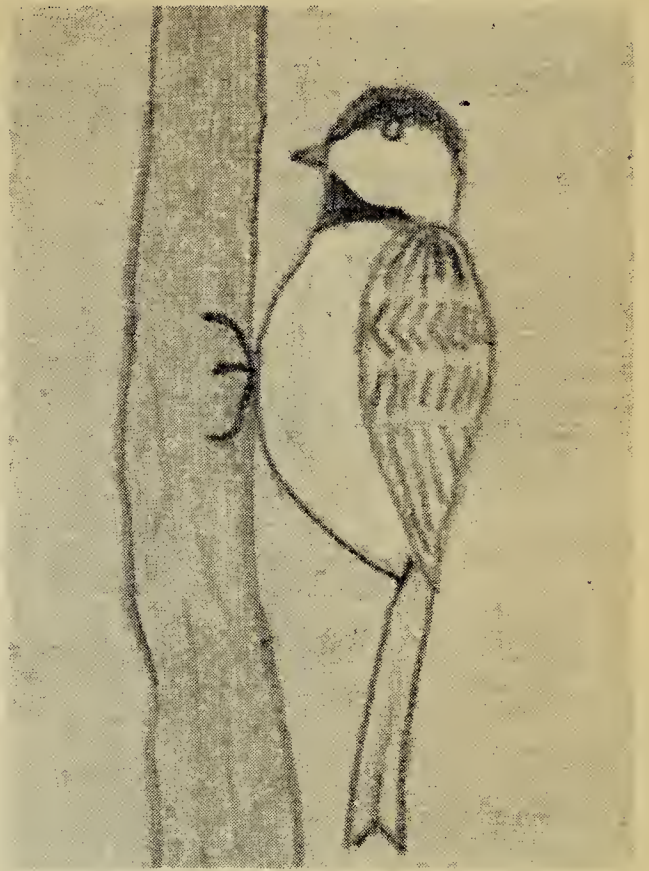
Around December 1st when there was already some snow on the ground a lonely blackbird was found around our barnyard. It ate grain from the cattle feed in the loose-housing barn. It stayed around for about a week then disappeared suddenly. Mom said it must have died from the cold.

The first heavy snowfall of the season was mixed with rain and sleet so it clung to the trees. The branches were heavy and hung down like the ears of a Saanen Goat. The shrubs in our yard looked like heaping bowls of whipped cream. The last summer's bird nests up in the trees resembled generously filled ice-cream cones. It was a very interesting creation of Nature. When the moonlight shone on the snow it glittered with millions of stars like a picture on a Christmas card. Truly a beautiful sight.

CHICKADEES

by **Bohdan Pylypec**, age 11,
Yellow Creek

Chickadees are not very wild. Those by our house are so tame that occasionally one perches on my hand if I remain quite still. I've built a feeding tray and hung it on a tree near our house. The feeding tray



consists of three walls, a sloping roof, and the shelf on which the birds feed.

The chickadees eat there mostly in the morning and early evening. At night the chickadees rest in their nests in hollow trees.

SQUIRRELS

by **Irene Pylypec**, age 9,
Yellow Creek

Squirrels are interesting animals. I am trying to tame a Red Squirrel by our house. I give it nuts and watch it nibble them. The squirrel stands up on its hind feet when it is eating and holds the nut with its front paws while its tail is curled up on its back.

THE PURPLE MARTIN

by **Marion Kruppi**, age 10,
Rhona Lake

We had a family of Purple Martins in our school yard this summer. Mr. Isinger, our teacher, built a house for four families. We watched the martins but we don't know how many eggs they laid. When the babies hatched, the parents were kept very busy finding insects. When the martins finished using their nest, Mr. Isinger took the house down, cleaned it out and put it away for next year.