

Red Fox on the Increase ?



Sketch of red fox by Richard W. Sutton, Director, Manitoba Natural History Museum.

This little drawing, which was made several years ago, was recently submitted to the **Blue Jay** through the courtesy of Fred. G. Bard, Director, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History. Mr. Bard has indicated to us that several reports of high numbers of red foxes have come to his attention. In the months of December, 1962, and January, 1963, at least 150 have been shot. At Rowatt, seven miles south of Regina, 26 were taken in and around the J. Baker farm. Another report comes from the vicinity of Avonlea where 50 were taken. A single silver fox was among the reds.

We feel, along with Mr. Bard, that there is a need for more comprehensive reports of the changing status of our wildlife species. We hope that responsible authorities will provide further information on the red fox, lynx (there have been casual reports of this northern species in the prairie region), and the much maligned bobcat. The latter species is still unfortunately not even afforded the protection of a game species. We wonder how much longer we should allow this interesting mammal to be classed, along with rats and house sparrows, as vermin?—ED. NOTE.

Cougars In Saskatchewan

by Tom White, Regina

Occasional records of the mountain lion or cougar in Saskatchewan have generally been believed to be of wanderers from the Rockies. How-

ever, evidence coming to light in recent years suggests to me that cougars may occur as residents within the province. This may seem unlikely to

many Saskatchewan residents; however, cougars were killed in the Cypress Hills in 1914, at Kindersley in 1939, and in the Pasqua Hills in 1948. In addition I have recently compiled over 100 reports of sightings of cougars, their tracks, or kills ascribed to this species over the last few years. Sight reports are not always valid evidence, for when an animal is seen in dim light or when moving at some distance, details are indistinct and animals may seem larger than they actually are. The lynx and bobcat have much in common with the cougar; the lynx, especially, has long legs which support its body relatively high above the ground, and its long legs when thrown out behind in running might be mistaken for a long tail. Wolves, coyotes, and feral dogs have long tails and at dusk may appear to have a colour similar to that of a cougar. On the other hand, cougars are nearly four times the weight of a lynx or a bobcat, and they have a very long tail and relatively small head—features which provide a distinct means of identification. I believe that a portion of the sightings which have come to my attention are correct. It is of special interest to note that the majority of the sightings have occurred where there is the best range and the most valid evidence for the existence of the cougar.

Suitable conditions for cougar range are found in two areas of the province. One is the Pasqua Hills, one of the wildest parts of the pro-

vince; between the Carrot and Red Deer rivers there are 4,000 square miles of heavy forest. In addition there is a vast forest area to the north and to the southeast in the Porcupine Hills and Riding Mountain. The hills abound in deer and other game and there are few people other than trappers and loggers. Mr. Joe Fournier, who traps in the Pasqua Hills, in addition to obtaining a cougar specimen which has been mounted and which is on display in the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, recently reports having seen three further sets of tracks and three cougar kills. North of Yorkton the RCMP recorded tracks which have been accepted as authentic. In addition to these eight pieces of evidence I have obtained records of more than 60 alleged sightings in the Pasqua Hills or adjacent areas. There have also been seven reports from an area in western Manitoba which is connected to the Pasqua Hills by forest.

Suitable cougar range is also found in southern Saskatchewan where there is a semi-arid area extending from the Cypress Hills east to Avonlea and Milestone with a connection to the South Saskatchewan River via the Great Sand Hills. This area is connected to the Rockies by the Milk River and to southern areas of badlands by Frenchman's Creek and other streams. To the south are the Bearpaw Mountains, only some 50 miles away. As already mentioned cougars were killed in the Cypress



Joe Fournier and his Pasqua Hills cougar.

Hills 20 or more years ago; in addition I now have records of over 30 recent sightings in this area.

In parts of the Maritimes the cougar was thought to be extinct since before the turn of the century, but it has been recently shown that a small breeding group still exists in that region. I think that it is possible that a similar condition exists in Saskatchewan. Cougars have probably always been comparatively rare in the province. This large cat is mainly nocturnal, shy, wary, and lives in different habitats. However, two essential conditions for cougar range are a plentiful supply of deer and a sparse human population. Their main food is deer, although they also eat small mammals. Occasionally they will kill cattle or foals when left unguarded, but in eastern Canada there is little evidence of this occurring and it would appear that when deer are plentiful cougars seldom attack domestic stock.

The considerable information on which this brief account of my study

is based has been obtained over a relatively short period of time and it appears that further records may be forthcoming. I intend to prepare a full account of our findings at a later date and presently am hoping to elicit more information. The writer would welcome any further evidence or sightings either past or present. It would particularly be appreciated if anyone with new information or recent sightings would contact me as soon as possible after the event so that as much evidence as possible may be gathered. This is the only way in which it will be possible to determine whether or not there is a resident population of the cougar in Saskatchewan. Correspondents should contact me directly at 1919 Scarth Street, Regina.

ED. NOTE: Bruce Wright's book—**The Ghost of North America** (1959. Vanguard Press, New York. 133 pp.)—should be read by everyone interested in conserving wildlife species. Wright's "Ghost" is the mountain lion or cougar, a relatively rare animal which ought to receive protection, at least as a game animal. We agree with Wright when he says: "DON'T SHOOT TO PROVE THERE IS ONE..."

ATTENTION ROCKHOUNDS

by **Watson Crossley**, Grandview,
Manitoba

Since the last issue of the **Blue Jay** with its item on rock tumblers and a news note from the Saskatoon lapidary and mineral club seven letters have come in encouraging us to continue with a rockhound section. Tom Bird suggests, however, that less scientific items be put in a newsletter and this may be a good idea. Since there is not enough space for items on our hobby in this issue, I will send out a mimeographed newsletter to all those requesting it.

In this letter I shall attempt to answer two of the questions most commonly asked me. First, what sort of equipment should one get for the cutting and polishing of rocks, and second, can one make some or all of the machine oneself?

If a person is really interested in making a start in cutting rocks I would certainly recommend that he subscribe to one of the lapidary magazines. Then a study of various kinds of equipment advertised can be made. The person should also visit someone who has equipment and

actually see the things that will be required by this hobby.

Generally I would recommend the purchase, rather than the making, of equipment, especially the saw, for this is a precision machine. Lap and polishing machines are not so difficult to make, however, and they may be made at home.

NOTICE TO SASKATCHEWAN ARCHAEOLOGISTS

A meeting of all interested people will be held in the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, on April 20, 1963, to form a Saskatchewan Archaeological Society. This will be an all-day meeting, and officers will be elected at that time.

The interim committee planning the meeting has already distributed a newsletter (February, 1963). If you are interested in receiving this letter, or in details of the programme for the April meeting, write Bruce McCorquodale at the Museum.