

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

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



Brandon Bird Club. Mr. J. Lane and the Junior Birders with many of the bird houses which they constructed. (See Doug. Wong's report on the next page.) -

COMMENTS AND PRIZE WINNERS

We are pleased to report that the number of entries to the Junior Naturalist's section has increased and we are looking forward to an even greater number of letters from boys and girls this spring and summer. We would particularly like to thank Mrs. Doris Anderson and Mrs. Marjorie Russell for sending in entries from their schools as well as the boys and girls who sent in their observations. A special welcome goes out to the newcomers to our page.

We are pleased to have several regular contributors with us including Ralph Underwood with his excellent insect studies and Bohdan Pylyec with more of his bird observations. It was Bohdan who drew the Cedar Waxwing in the last issue of the **Blue Jay**.

It was finally decided to award the prize to Joe Michael who has done a fair amount of wondering about and investigation of some small forms of animal life which he found in a crack in the ice.

A prize will be awarded again next issue for the best entry.

RING-NECKED PHEASANT

by **Rachel Niniowski**, age 10,
Kamsack

On October 28, 1962, our family was driving on No. 8 highway between Wroxton and Churchbridge when we saw a pheasant cross the highway and walk into a patch of willow shrubs.

The land there is fairly level with lots of marshy sloughs. The trees are mostly poplar bluffs and willow shrubs.

We knew this bird was a Ring-necked Pheasant because of its size which was twice as big as a prairie chicken, its white ring on the neck, the beautiful metallic sheen of its purple head, the brown speckled body and its long tail feathers. This pheasant was much bigger than the pheasant we had seen in the Assiniboine Park Zoo at Winnipeg. Besides being larger it was also plumper and much neater in appearance.

I think wild birds look more attractive when observed in their wild state and in their natural surroundings.

GOLDEN EAGLE



NOTE: Norman Nelson, Boise, Idaho, sent us several drawings and tells us that he trains falcons and hawks to hunt; and his interest in wildlife originates from eight years of falconry. Drawing he picked up from practice. He continued that the Golden Eagle needs protection and felt his drawing might fit nicely into the Blue Jay.

MARVEL OF NATURE

by **Joe Michel**, age 14, Kendal

On a cold clear evening January 15, 1963, at about 5.30 p.m., with the temperature at about 20° below zero, my brother Carl led me to a clearing in the willow bush behind our house. There was a lot of ice caused by an underground spring, which broke the surface there. In the ice there was a crack which contained many small insects. Imagine my surprise to find insects swimming around in water at this temperature. I later found out (after much hunting through Encyclopedias and a Zoology handbook) that these insects are a type of water beetle resembling the water scavenger beetle. With these beetles there was another type of insect which I think are either the larvae of these beetles or a crustacean called the fairy shrimp. I collected about ten of each kind placing them in a jar of cool water.

In the nearby ice there were more of these insects, frozen solid.

When I got to the house, I put some parsley, chopped lettuce and cracker crumbs into the water. The beetles latched onto the food and appeared to be eating.

The larvae or fairy shrimps stay close to the bottom of the jar. Although they swim around a bit they are not nearly as active as the beetles which are diving and swimming constantly.

Our theory as to how these insects came to be in the ice is that the crack in the ice may extend to the underground spring where they live and breed. The pressure of the water could have forced them to the surface.

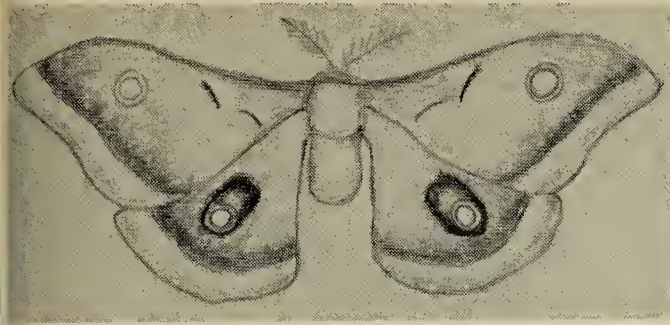
I would enjoy hearing from anyone who has seen or heard of a similar occurrence.

NEST BUILDING PROJECT REPORT

by **Doug Wong**, age 14, Brandon

During the 1961 season, our club under the able leadership of Mr. Lane, built and put up 121 bird nests as was reported in the **Blue Jay** for March, 1962.

This last winter our club doubled the number of nests built the previous year, building 250 nests. These were mostly built by adult birders. Some of these new nests were set out around the Brandon area by the Junior Birders last winter and spring. Mr. Lane would get together a group of boys and take us out for an enjoyable day, setting out the nests and bird watching as well. Two adult birders set out the balance of the nests, spreading them out from Campbell on the east to Broadview on the west. The results of the 1961-1962 bird-nest project were successful. The Tree Swallows occupied 21 nests, while Mountain Bluebirds nested in 15 nests. The Eastern Bluebirds raised their broods in four nests and the House Wrens claimed 11. Five nests were occupied by House Sparrows. Twenty-two nests were left vacant, while 75 were not checked. Unfortunately 22 were vandalized by humans, making a total count of 374 nests.



POLYPHEMUS OBSERVATIONS

by **Ralph Underwood**, age 16,
Strasbourg

On June 2, 1961, Dad caught a Polyphemus moth in Rowan's Ravine Park. This is a moth with a wing span of 5.5 inches. Its over all wing coloration is orangish brown becoming heavily flecked with black. Each wing has a transparent eye spot encircled with a yellow ring. In the lower wing the eye spots contain blue and are accented by a bold black border.

When Dad first saw it, it was being chased by a Killdeer and it took refuge on the tractor which Dad was running. Remembering that I was interested in insects, he brought it home and put it in a cardboard box. That night the moth laid 47 eggs in groups and individually on the walls of the box. They were white and rather like rounded squatty barrels. The moth died shortly after laying the eggs so I pinned her as a specimen.

Ten days later, on July 1, the eggs began hatching and by July 3, every egg had hatched. Before hatching the eggs would become quite dark colored. Then the larvae would eat a hole through the egg and crawl out. Many of the larvae ate the remaining egg shell.

The young caterpillars had large reddish brown heads and short slender yellowish white bodies which were sparsely covered with short silky hairs. Their average length was mm.

I transferred the larvae to a maple ranch, which I put in the box. Some of the larvae seemed to eat the tenderest leaves but others seemed prone to wander. I offered the larvae many other varieties of leaves, but they didn't seem satisfied.

Many of the larvae were dying. I don't know the reason for it although

it could be lack of right kind of leaves, or the leaves may have been too dry because of the dry year. Also the larvae may have been damaged as they hatched on the cardboard and had to be moved to the leaves. On July 5, because of the mortality rate, I released the remaining 13 larvae onto our trees.

A BEAVER ON LAND

by **Eileen Adair**, age 12, Maryfield

One night when my family was coming home from my uncle's we saw something very strange. About halfway home we saw something moving ahead. At first we thought it was a skunk or a porcupine but when we got closer it looked too big. At last we got close enough to see it. When we saw its broad flat tail we knew it was a beaver. It was walking right down the middle of the road so we couldn't get by it. At last Dad stopped the car because it was so slow and we weren't getting anywhere. Finally the beaver started to go to the edge of the road.

As we went past it I got a small glimpse of it. The beaver was quite fat and it was as big as a small collie dog. It had a very flat tail that looked quite strong. I could see the scales on it. After looking at it for a while we drove off. It wouldn't have been so strange to see a beaver on land but this one was at least two miles from water. This is one of the strangest things I have ever seen.

THE PET RABBIT

by **Murray Moore**, age 12,
Maryfield

One day I was out in the field stooking. It was about noon when I saw a rabbit run into a stook. I worked until noon then took the rabbit home with me. It was only a little bunny and was very fluffy. I put the little bunny in a box so that the cats wouldn't get to him and eat him and then I gave him leaves and grass to eat.

I kept feeding him for many days and one day I let him out. I left him out to play all day. At nightfall I put him back into his box forgetting to lock it. During the night the rabbit got out and by morning the tomcat had his fill of him. That was the end of my little rabbit.

A FASCINATING PET

by **Brenda Matte**, age 13, Maryfield

A few years ago a farmer found a fawn and brought it to my dad. The fawn was only about three days old when we got her. We named her Bambi. Because Bambi was so small and unafraid of anything we kept her in the house for the first few days. When we got a pen built for her she wouldn't stay in it, so we let her sleep in the house every night although she did play outside all day with the dogs. Duke, our big dog, was very protective towards Bambi. When feeding time came Bambi would walk over to the fridge and beg for her bottle. Her feeding times were three times a day and once at five o'clock in the morning. By the time Bambi was about two and one half weeks old she knew her way all over town.

When we raced on the lawn Bambi always won. She could run faster than me or the dogs. Bambi grew rapidly and soon she began to lose her spots. Hunting season was coming soon so we took Bambi to the zoo at Brandon. I think Bambi was one of the most fascinating pets I have ever had.

THREE JACKRABBITS

by **Stella Ronaghan**, age 7, Chauvin

North of the Battle River we saw three jackrabbits together at the edge of the road. We just about ran over one but it ran off the road. They ran in front of the car because the lights blinded them. They didn't know where they were running.

THE CHICKEN BREAKFAST

by **Dale Flynn**, age 12, Maryfield

One morning I awoke because there was a lot of noise outside. I looked out the window and saw a coyote after a rooster. The coyote chased the rooster up to the house and was about to grab it when I ran out and told the dog to get him. Tippy almost caught him but he got away.

MY PET GARTER SNAKES

by **Brian Evans**, age 11, Torch River

I always wanted a snake but I never could get one. Finally, one day last summer my parents came home from town and had a snake with them. My uncle had caught it and gave it to my parents to bring home to me. That night my dad and I made a pen for it but the next day it got away. Then my uncle got me about four or five of them and we fixed the pen better and they did not get away. I had one about two feet long and one about one and a half feet long and then a little one only six inches long. I like the one about two feet long the best. I called him Joe and taught him to go around my neck and stay there. Some people say that they are slimy but they are not. I fed them little bits of meat and kept water in their pen. They swam in it and drank some too. Later on I gave some away and two of them died because I left them outside and there was not enough sand for them to dig under. Just the little one lives and I've still got him. He is sleeping in a dark corner in the basement.

BIRDS AROUND THE HOUSE

by **Bodhan Pylypec**, age 12,
Yellow Creek

The chickadees are the most common bird to come to my feeding tray. About four or five come in the morning and evening. Only one feeds while the others wait. After eating some scraps they go to feed in the branches of trees. Sometimes when I'm at a distance the chickadee picking sounds like a woodpecker hammering. Once in a while a Downy Woodpecker pays a visit to the feeding tray. After some hammering he gets off in the trees.

The chokecherries attract the Ruffed Grouse. When they eat the swing sometimes almost upside down. They come early in the morning or late in the evening when it is quite dark. The birch cones attract the Tree Sparrows. They, too, like the Ruffed Grouse, swing on the branches but usually upside down.

Lately I've seen seven Bohemian Waxwings. They were flying around and searching for chokecherries. These are the first arrivals I've seen this winter.