

Some Interesting Lynx Observations

by Dave Santy, Beechy

Two young lads, Dennis (11) and Laurie (10), sons of Mr. and Mrs. Harold Pennes, living about seven miles northwest of Beechy, solved the problem of the continuing depreciation of their chicken flock last summer (1963). Playing in the farm yard one day in late August they were startled when a huge cat fairly flew out of a tree in the shelter belt, pounced on a chicken, and carried it away from almost under their feet. They followed through the trees to see the cat with its prey disappear into the trees around a pothole in the adjacent summerfallow field. The boys ran to the house to inform their father of the incident. Armed with a shotgun, Mr. Pennes could find no trace of the thief. He explained to the boys that it undoubtedly was a wild cat, a lynx, in fact.

The boys were immediately filled with a spirit of adventure. They would catch that cat if it ever came back to steal their chickens. They found a quantity of ravelled baling twine and went to work making snares according to their own ideas and set them up in the tree and around beneath it. As with boys of that age the thrill of the moment was soon forgotten and they went on into further adventure. The snares were merely part of their play and were not checked again. A couple of weeks later they happened to play at the same place and were surprised to find a lynx suspended from a branch of the tree, head downward and firmly held in place by the two hind legs in one of their play snares. The head of the lynx was about four feet off the ground. The unfortunate animal must have been caught soon after the snares were set for when we were called to the scene we noted that decomposition was already beginning.

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About two weeks later Lawrence Herzberg, a 19-year-old helper on the Martin Flynn farm, six miles north of Beechy, had a rather exciting experience with another lynx. Cultivating a big acreage stubble field he was confronted midway in the furrow by a lynx sitting directly in his

path. As the machinery approached it made no move to get out of the way. Lawrence stopped the machinery but left the tractor running in neutral. Immediately, the lynx ran around to the right side of the tractor and sprang at him. It was able to hold to the rubber tread of the high drive wheel, but had difficulty getting a claw grip on the metal fender. This gave Lawrence time to reach under the tractor seat where a clawhammer was suspended. With the hammer he reached over and dealt the big cat a blow on the side of its neck. It dropped to the ground and was bracing for another spring, whereupon the young man grabbed a heavy coat he was using as a seat cushion and vigorously shook this back and forth in front of the animal. This seemed to deter it so that it walked away. Lawrence lost no time in lifting the cultivator out of work position. He moved the tractor into road gear and hied for home.

COMMENTS ON LYNX INVASION

Biologists and naturalists are generally aware that a major invasion of the Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*) has occurred in the Prairie Provinces and in the adjacent States over the last two years. The two observations reported above, from the district where we intend to hold our summer meetings in June, 1964, are but two of many such sightings.

The movement of the Lynx from its usual habitat in the northern Boreal Forest has given many people their first opportunity to see this beautiful animal. It is unfortunate that the encounter between man and animal so often ends with the death of the great northern forest cat. Low populations of the Snowshoe Rabbit, which is the major prey species of the Lynx, may explain the presence of the Lynx out on the plains several hundreds of miles from its usual habitat.

We would like to urge our members and interested people to submit any records of the Lynx which they may

have. We have heard, for instance, that a large number have been captured alive in the city of Calgary. We have heard, also, of many newspaper articles describing the demise of a lynx. We would like to collect all the information we can on the Lynx invasion, so please send your records and have other interested people send their records to the **Blue Jay** editors, Box 1121, Regina. Our objectives are twofold: to record the behaviour of this interesting animal, even under these unusual circumstances, and to document its occurrence, in order to record permanently this astonishing forced movement of a wildlife species. Fifty years from now this information will be extremely interesting and valuable. The November, 1963, issue of **North Dakota Outdoors**, official publication of the State Game

and Fish Department of that state, gives a fine report of the situation in that area in an article entitled "The Lynx Explosion".

It is unfortunate that the Wildlife Branch of the Saskatchewan Department of Natural Resources and the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History are not in a position to properly document, study, and report to the public such widespread and interesting wildlife phenomena. It has been explained that they do not have the time or resources to do this. We should therefore urge our legislators to provide the additional staff where needed in these agencies in order to ensure that proper attention is paid to wildlife on our behalf, on the public's behalf, and on the behalf of wildlife itself.—**Blue Jay** Editors.

Further Comments on Whistling Snowshoe Rabbits

by **Helge S. Abrahamson**, Sylvan Lake, Alberta

In the September, 1963, issue of the **Blue Jay** there is an interesting article by R. R. Hooper: "Saw-whet Owl—the case of the whistling rabbit." Hooper states that in the Punichy district of Saskatchewan some Indians believe that the Snowshoe Rabbit or Varying Hare is the source of a peculiar whistling sound heard at night. Hooper identifies this instead as the call of the little owl called the Saw-whet Owl.

I have lived all my life in the Sylvan Lake district of Alberta and have observed Snowshoe Rabbits on many occasions. My house is located in a heavily wooded area of poplar trees where these rabbits are very abundant. Many times upon hearing the whistling I have slowly edged toward the apparent source of the sound and with the aid of a powerful flashlight have found a rabbit. When I stood still for some length of time the rabbit resumed its whistling, and was then only about 40 feet away from me. When I turned my flashlight upon it once more, it quickly stood up on its hind legs, ceased whistling, turned around, then quickly moved away some distance before resuming its whistling act.

In the 1930's this area contained a few of the now scarce Saw-whet Owls which also give a whistling call. However, the rabbit's whistling is much more highly pitched and can readily be traced to its source whereas the call of the owl often seems to be coming from a distant point.

The call of the Saw-whet Owl is usually heard in the night from February to April. The rabbit's whistle is usually heard in the night, but often throughout the day, starting early in March and continuing until early June. I believe that these whistling sounds are the respective mating calls of the Saw-whet Owl and the Snowshoe Rabbit.

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