

# BLUE JAY CHATTER

This year, 1963, may long be remembered in southern Saskatchewan and most parts of adjoining provinces as the year of frequent rains. In spite of local hail and flooding damage, farmers will have the satisfaction of producing the biggest crop in the history of the west. Naturalists, too, rejoice in a fruitful year; hillsides have remained green and some sloughs have begun to fill with water again.

I have found it a real pleasure to travel about the province this summer, for with the abundant plant growth everything seems to have prospered. It is a common sight driving out from Regina in the evening to see mice run across the road. Those who are not aware of insects, mice, and small forms of life will frequently notice a Short-eared Owl or a skunk or fox. Too often these animals are only seen as dead animals along our highways; on a recent trip to Saskatoon I saw two dead Red Fox along the road and the remains of several Striped Skunks. Young animals need time to learn about lights and the speed of cars. In Sherwood Municipality this year I watched a family of young Red Fox and once I came on a family of Badger. I think this Regina municipality is to be congratulated for its banning of firearms.

The traveller in our province sees considerable evidence of good conservation practice. On the way to the Summer Meeting we stopped in to see Harry Coulter and his ranch where he has consistently prevented the setting out of poison baits. The results of his sound conservation practices are obvious. In the provincial Cypress Hills Park protection is combined with much enjoyment of wildlife. Limited grazing allows for the development of a rich grass cover and we cannot help wondering why the effort is being made to change some of this into a forest.

On our way home from the Cypress Hills we went with Ruth and David Chandler to visit the Prairie Dogs and the Sage Grouse. Since these species occur only locally, we were concerned to find two men, sitting in a car, enjoying the "sport" of shooting at Prairie Dogs. I agree with the Chandlers that it would be a fine project for our society to buy this original site for a Prairie Dog Sanctuary.

We saw evidence elsewhere that there is lots of work to do for conservation. We found that the bogs at Prince Albert, owing to road building, ditching and city expansion, are slowly drying up, and their characteristic plants disappearing. When we did see *Pinguicula vulgaris* L., the butterwort which has been found nowhere else in Saskatchewan, we felt there were good reasons for trying to protect these bogs from further drainage. During the summer we heard of boys at camp, because of lack of knowledge and leadership, peeling the bark and causing the death of birch trees. We heard of people who still did not know that our hawks and owls are protected during the summer months.

We cannot all contribute to conservation in a spectacular way as ranchers with large holdings or governments may do, but we can help others to be more interested in, and more understanding of, nature. Any time we can influence a person who is ruining a tree, picking a rare flower, or in the name of sport getting rid of some bird or mammal, we have contributed something. We can also, of course, contribute financially to the **Blue Jay** or to other undertakings of our society.

Recently we had a handsome \$200 bequest from a Regina member to go toward the purchase of land for a sanctuary. This has been added to our special conservation fund. The society has considered acquiring property for a Sandhill Crane Refuge and for a Prairie Dog Refuge; so far no definite project has been undertaken. We should like to have you write to us with suggestions as to how our society can best contribute to the cause of conservation. Where should we be spending our money on sanctuaries and how can we raise the money to operate them?