

Junior Naturalists

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

FALL ADVENTURES AND ACTIVITIES

by **Joyce Deutscher**, Regina, Sask.

Let's look at some of the adventures awaiting boys and girls this fall in the classroom and out of it.

Fall is the time of increased activity as plants and wild animals prepare for winter. It should be a time of increased activity for boys and girls, too, as they crowd in all the nature observation they can before the snows of winter cover up much of what is to be seen.

Here are some suggested activities you can carry out either individually or as a group activity. Perhaps you can talk your teacher into using some of them as classroom activities:

1. Survey your back yard, school yard, sidewalk on the way to school, or a country road. List all the plant and animal life and other interesting features you can find. If you don't know the name of an object use descriptive words. If you live in the city perhaps you can list an interesting garden, the trees lining the sidewalk, a house with interesting stonework and similar items. Make a survey of the same area in the winter and again in the spring noting the changes. You will find your daily walk to school much more interesting if you are aware of the changes going on around you.

2. Here is a game you can play with your friends. Give each player or group of players a pail full of water from a pond with some of the mud included from the pond bottom. Explore your pail of water and see how many different plants, animals, and other objects you can find. A magnifying glass adds to the fun. Look up as much information as you can about the things you find in your pail.

3. Why don't you set up a nature trail? Find a wooded valley, a marsh edge, a sunny hillside, or even a grove of trees in your own back yard. Mark a path through it with numbered stakes. Set each stake at some point of interest such as an ash tree, a large rock, or a moss covered log. Take your friends along the trail and see what they can find that

you have missed. Look up as much information as you can find about the objects along the trail. Make notes by putting down the number of the stake and the information you have about that particular part of your nature trail.

4. Pretend you are a Park Naturalist and take some of your friends on a nature walk and point out the things you see along the way. Then let someone else lead the group in another direction and see how much he can find to show the group.

5. Make a collection of dried weeds, leaves, flowers gone to seed, and containers — pickle jars, fancy bowls, soap dishes, boxes. Then plan a "flower" show. Arrange your dried plants attractively in containers and invite your friends to do likewise. This could be done as a classroom project with one of the entries being the arrangement of dried material from the plant families you are studying as part of your science course. For example, see who can get the most interesting arrangement of plants from the composite family.

6. Plan an art show. Take your crayons and make sketches and designs of fall flowers and other plants, also make arrangements of pressed leaves and paste them on a coloured background. Make seed pictures. Use the winged seeds of the maple for a boy's pants, a pumpkin seed for his body, and a stinkweed seed for his head. Use your imagination and invent other seed pictures. Draw lines for hands and legs. Invite your friends to send entries to your show.

7. Write about some of your experiences and adventures to this section of the **Blue Jay**. Encourage your friends to write as well. See how many of you can write a note about some of your observations which are interesting enough to get into print. But most important of all, have fun with your nature adventures.

CONTEST WINNER

Bohdan Pylypec is awarded the prize this issue for his continued interest and for his well-written accounts of his activities.



Painting by Norman Nelson

Mallard

HONOR ROLL

A number of junior naturalists have contributed fairly regularly to our section and we would like to give them special recognition such as "Honor Naturalist" or some such title after they have a certain number of items published in the **Blue Jay**. Any suggestions?

CONTEST RULES

Any boy or girl may enter the letter writing contest. Entries must be first-hand observations and not something copied from a book or other source. All entries must be accompanied by the name, age, and address of the sender. Send entries to Blue Jay Contest, Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, to arrive not later than October 15. Sketches and photographs may be sent in as

well. The prize is a year's subscription to the **Blue Jay** plus the honour of seeing your items printed in the **Blue Jay**!

FLOWER IDENTIFIED

Bohdan Pylypec gives us the following report on the response he received to his question in the last issue of the **Blue Jay**. We are pleased to see this much response shown to his enquiry:

"The flower that I wrote about in the last **Blue Jay** is the Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*). I have come to this conclusion because I got a photo (coloured) from Mr. James L. Parker of Gilbert Plains, Manitoba, a leaf sample from Miss Elsie Dobryden of Sanford, Manitoba, and a leaf and flower sample from Mr. George Stevenson from the Brandon Experimental Farm herbarium. Miss Elsie Dobryden states

that this flower is also called by some people "Old Man's Whiskers."

Another letter identifying Bohdan's plant as Common Tansy came to the **Blue Jay** Editor from Mrs. Mary Capusten, Prince Albert.

THE HOUSE WREN

by **Arlene Swicheniuk**, age 13,
Tarnopol

At our place we have a House Wren that built her nest under the eaves of our house. The Sparrows do not chase the small House Wren away. The two families co-operate.

Early every morning and after sunset in the evening the House Wren sings by our window.

OUR WILDLIFE IS BEING EXTERMINATED

by **Bohdan Pylypec**, Yellow Creek

Years ago buffalo roamed the area. Now we have only traces of them such as buffalo skulls which we have found. One head is in good shape so we will use it as a decoration in our house. Elk, too, were in the area since I have found an antler of one. Deer were quite numerous some years ago, but now are quite scarce. Nine years ago when we settled on the farm where we are at present, deer would come curiously by our house and at a short distance would look inside the house through the windows. We would just look back. Even although deer are scarce a whole pack of hunters would go hunting and see how many deer they could get. Quite often these hunters were of the careless kind. They would shoot some cattle mistaking them for deer. We have had an occasion where some careless hunters shot at our bee hives instead of a deer.

Rabbits at one time were so plentiful that usually every morning after a snowfall tracks could be seen on our doorstep. Extreme hunting done both by man and predators (chiefly coyotes) and diseases have lowered the population. Some rabbits were shot for fun. Because of the low rabbit population owls, coyotes and other predators have found it hard to live.

Muskrats were, at the time of the wet years, plentiful, but then started an extreme trapping boom. Young and old alike were trapped until the

dry years when the muskrat population was very low. During these dry years the animals had to migrate in search of water. They then became easy prey for predators. During this migration you could occasionally pass a hissing muskrat in some bushes.

GUM-CHEWING RABBIT

by **Gerald Swicheniuk**, age 11,
Tarnopol

About the first part of May my Dad caught a baby jack rabbit. He was small and hard to feed at first. Now we feed him with some milk, some grass, bark and other things that he can gnaw at. If he sees or smells gum he tries to get some.

He likes to dig in ground or gravel. Sometimes he likes to roll.

Do you think he will turn white in the winter time if he stays in the house?

HENPECKED

by **Len Nash**, age 13, Islington, Ont.

Early in June my friend Eric Southey and I started out on what we hoped would be an adventurous hike. We went to a small valley and wherever we turned our path was blocked by low, prickly trees. Many of these trees held the nests of Brown Thrashers and Robins. The Brown Thrasher nests were loosely constructed and made of leaves, twigs, and rootlets.

One nest which we discovered had the bird sitting on it and remained there silently watching us cautiously with its red eyes. When we went forth to examine the nest and its contents, the bird jumped around, screeched at us, and gave us a thrashing! It then alighted on a nearby tree. In the nest were five eggs, four being those of the Thrasher and the other one being a Cowbird's.

Later in the day we found the nest of a Sparrow Hawk. When we climbed the tree to see the nest inside the tree, the Hawk swooped down at us in an attempt to scare us away from the nest. It scarcely missed me by two feet, and this brought back to me memories of last year when another incident like this occurred in which I found a nest of a Red-winged Blackbird and seconds later the screaming male Red-winged Blackbird lit on my head. After our many unusual experiences we left for home.