

## Junior Naturalists

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

### SO YOU HAVE NOTHING TO EXPLORE

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

You have nothing but a plowed field behind your house and there aren't any trees along the sidewalk. It's miles to the nearest pond, and well, there just isn't anything to see—no birds, no trees, no flowers. Or perhaps you do have a pond next door which you visit frequently but you want to adventure into new fields of interest.

Why not try weather forecasting? One thing you are certain to have around you, the minute you step outside, is weather. Feel the air. It can be hot or cold, damp or dry, moving or still. Overhead the sky is either cloudy, clear or somewhere in between. Why not sharpen up your powers of observation and see if you can outguess the weatherman?

You will need the following equipment to start—keen eye, patience, a good imagination (you don't have much else to work with at first, so you'll have to use it) and a pencil and paper.

The old Indian used to sit outside his tipi to forecast the weather. You can do the same. Sit on your doorstep and look at the sky. Feel the wind. What direction is it from? Hold a moist finger up in the air to test it. What do you think the temperature is? Make a guess and write it down. Are there any clouds? Make a sketch of them or write down their description or name in your note book. Do the clouds look like wet weather clouds, or do they look more like fair weather clouds? Would you say they were high, medium high or low in the sky? Write down your observations about the weather. If you do some practice like this each day, you will soon improve and you can check your findings with the weather forecast in the paper or over radio or T.V. and you can also start collecting your own equipment—thermometer, weather vane, rain gauge, barometer.

Your notes are for your own use. Make sure you can understand them,

but don't worry if your great aunt Sue can't understand. You probably can't understand half the things she does either.

Can you "read" the clouds? Clouds frequently tell you what kind of weather to expect. The commonest and most easily recognized of the low clouds are cumulus. They look like a pile of milky foam in the sky and, indeed, their name comes from the Latin word for "heap". The base of these clouds is usually flat and being in their own shadow they appear dark compared to the tops of the cloud. Cumulus clouds usually indicate fair weather, unless they are very dark and piled high. However, on hot muggy days they may bring showers.

A wind from the west (a west wind) is another indication of fair weather. Is the weather on the prairies usually fair or rainy? Are the winds usually from the east or from the west? Make a simple weather vane and set it high above the ground to help you tell wind direction.

The temperature is likely to fall as a period of fair weather approaches. Place your thermometer where it is exposed to the wind but fully shaded. Take several temperature readings a day.

Air pressure is measured with a barometer. A rising barometer usually indicates fair weather. Perhaps you can find a reference book which will tell you how to make a simple barometer, but don't worry if you don't have one—the old Indian never used such "tools".

The speed of wind is another factor to consider. The speed of the wind tends to decrease as we enter a period of fair weather.

Since the general rules for forecasting fair weather are falling temperature, wind from the west and decreasing in speed, and an increase in barometric pressure you can expect the indications for rainy weather to be the opposite. Expect rainy weather, then, if the wind is from the east, the clouds are not cumulus, there is a greater than normal rise in temper-



ature as the day advances and the barometric pressure is falling.

By now you will be ready for more help than I have been able to give you in one short article. If you do not have access to a Public Library and if you live in Saskatchewan you can write to the Public Information Library, 1819 Cornwall St., Regina, Sask. They lend books free of charge.



Downy Woodpecker  
by Brian Irving, Kelvington

## BIRD STUDY CONTEST RESULTS

Congratulations to those five boys and girls who entered this contest! These naturalists have gone to a considerable amount of work. Two of them are "old-timers"—Brian Irving and Bohdan Pylypec. The others we welcome to our page and hope to hear from them again. The contestants were as follows: Robin Tamasi, Vernon, B.C., age 15; Brian Irving, Kelvington, age 13; Dorothy Taylor, Parkman, age 12; Bohdan Pylypec, Yellow Creek, age 14; and Peter Wayte, Regina, age 12.

Some of the entries read too much as if they were copied directly from bird books. Contestants should put

down their own observations in their own words. The contestant who was most successful in doing this was Dorothy Taylor. To her goes the prize. Congratulations, Dorothy. To the rest of you, many thanks for entering this contest; we needed your support. Keep trying and better luck next time.

## EXTRACTS FROM BIRD STUDY CONTEST

Robin Tamasi writes, "This year we have a Tree Swallow nesting in a bluebird house which had a wren in it last year. The pair of swallows are still not sure whether to nest here or not but they come and inspect it early every morning."

Dorothy Taylor writes about a Barn Swallow, "This bird does not come back to Saskatchewan until the middle of May because it feeds on insects and insects don't come out of their winter sleeping quarters until later when it is warmer. The swallow destroys many insects that are very annoying to us and if it wasn't for this bird there would be many more insects to fight."

## BOHDAN PYLYPEC AWARDED "HONOR NATURALIST" TITLE

Our records for the last year (since September, 1963) show that Bohdan Pylypec has made the most contributions to this section for the past year and is therefore awarded the title of "Honor Naturalist". From now on, when writing to this section of the **Blue Jay**, Bohdan can put the initials H.N. after his name.

Congratulations, Bohdan. Let's see how many more Junior Naturalists can earn the title of "Honor Naturalist" by next September.

## LETTER WRITING CONTEST

Any boy or girl may enter the letter writing contest. Entries must be first hand observations. All entries must be accompanied by the name, age and address of the sender. Send entries to Blue Jay Contest, c/o Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, Regina, to arrive not later than October 14. Sketches and photographs may be sent as well. The prize is a year's subscription to the **Blue Jay** plus the honor of seeing your items in print!



## BIRDS OF THE KELVINGTON AREA

by **Brian Irving**, age 13, Kelvington

On the gloomy morning of August 31, 1963, my grandmother, aunt and myself went on a drive up to Greenwater Provincial Park, some thirty four miles from home. On the way a couple of Sparrow Hawks were seen perched on a telephone line. The Vesper Sparrows and Common Crows as usual were seen in large flocks. When we arrived and looked around a little we noticed a flock of about thirty Cedar Waxwings feeding in a grove of aspens; there were also a few Hairy Woodpeckers around.

After lunch a flock of Brewer's Blackbirds and an Eastern Phoebe were located in the bush. On the way home we decided to take a back road to see if we could find anything.

We had to travel several extra miles but we did see three Mourning Doves perched on a lonely telephone line.

On September 2, I heard some sparrows singing in a bluff behind our house. After some time I identified one species as the Savannah Sparrow and a flock of Vespers. There was also a Philadelphia Vireo flitting between the trees.

On September 5, a Warbling Vireo was heard in an aspen bluff. Two large flocks of Brewer's and Red-winged Blackbirds were seen in marshy areas. A pair of Rough-legged Hawks were soaring with outspread wings over a meadow.

While I was riding horseback on September 8, I found a small owl on a road. I thought it might be an eared owl but couldn't be sure. When I got home and looked it up I decided it was a Long-eared Owl. It had apparently been hit by a car.

There were several Yellow-shafted Flickers around and a large flock of McCown's Longspurs were feeding on a summerfallow field. A lonely Robin was perched in a dead aspen and an American Goldfinch flew across a meadow. A half dozen Magnolia Warblers flew into a clump of willows. Even a Western Meadowlark was heard. At dusk a beautiful White-tailed doe and two young stood at the edge of a bluff for a moment.

Then with tails up like flags they dashed into the trees.

At school on the 10th a fairly large flock of Purple Martins went swooping around in their search for insects. At Bob Fraser's home just across the street he has two nestboxes with several sections in each. Always, a lot of birds nest there. These same birds were present the following day; no doubt some of these were from Mr. Fraser's nestboxes.

## WINTER AROUND THE TREGARVA DISTRICT, 1963-64

by **Kenneth Dickson**, Tregarva

The first day of winter comes after a long fall, and you think it was never going to snow.

As for some of our wildlife, they are much pleased about the lack of snow. The deer don't have to plow snow in search of food. As for the rabbit he doesn't like this for he is turning white and can be seen much more easily by Mr. Red Fox.

But at last it snows. The Snow Buntings start coming in big flocks, all singing and flying about on the roads. You walk down into the valley and the chickadees are there by the dozens all very curious to see what is coming and who you are.

One day Doug Gilroy and I went for an afternoon walk. It was about 35 above, 25 mile per hour wind and snowing very hard. We walked down into the valley to see what we could spot.

When we got down in among the trees it was quite nice. We saw a deer which saw us, so it turned, snorted and ran. Then we spotted a bushy porcupine. He came down from his tree and headed for his den which consisted of a pile of brush. He crawled underneath. Along the bank of the creek you could see his tunnels every once in a while. As we went on through the trees we came across a very big flock of Pine Grosbeaks, very pretty indeed, all singing and fluttering about.

(To be continued in next issue)