

MY TRAP LINE

by **Delmer Dutka**, age 13, Yellow Creek

During the last fall and winter I had a trap line. I set snares and traps for squirrels and set traps for weasels and muskrats.

On Saturdays and Sundays I would go to sloughs around Yellow Creek and trap muskrats.

Each week I caught about five muskrats and two squirrels.

I caught 42 muskrats, 11 squirrels and two weasels. One muskrat was 11 inches long and nine inches wide at the bottom and I got \$2.40 for it. One weasel I caught was 23½ inches long stretched.

NATURE HIKE

by **Denise Beaulieu**, age 11, Indian Head

One morning when I was at Nipawin we went on a hike. Once when we were crossing a beaver dam there was a hummingbird sitting on top

of an old dead tree. The hummingbird was a glorious mixture of bright colours which glistened so much in the morning sun you couldn't tell the colours apart. It sat there for about 15 minutes, hovered in the air for a while, then flew away, but came back again later.

That morning we saw some pitcher plants as well as many other beautiful flowers. The pitcher plants grow in swamps. The leaves, which are shaped like pitchers, have many red and orange veins going through them. These pitchers have water in them. When insects fly in they are caught by the hairs in the leaf and drown in the water. The plant absorbs them for food.

We even saw some claw marks made by a bear going up a tree. There were a lot of other things we saw that morning. Too many to be mentioned here.

Letters and Notes

REGINA'S WASCANA WATERFOWL PARK

During my recent visit (October 1968) to Regina, I was drawn again to the Wascana marsh having been away from it for more than four years. A flood of wonderful memories of many past explorations of the marsh swept over me. I could sense again the companionship of those with whom I shared these outings and the changing seasons. I had known the marsh in all seasons and shared it with my Regina friends and many visitors of several nations. All of us were deeply imbued with the strategy of having a bit of naturalness of the Northern Great Plains within the bounds of one of the larger cities of western Canada.

All of us agreed that Wascana marsh offered great contrast to the contrivances of man. It also gave us a unity with nature, of which we are

an inseparable part. For us, the Regina scene was richer because of the marsh.

During the time I lived in Regina, my husband and I spent many hours not only at the marsh, but in defending it against those forces which would eliminate it or destroy its naturalness and great beauty.

I was deeply moved, during my recent visit, to see that the marsh was still there and that the University, the governments of the City and the Province, and private residents had not imposed upon or unduly invaded the bounds of the marsh as these had been set some five years ago.

I can only hope that all parties will continue to respect the uniqueness of this marsh and not invade it further. My husband and I will always remember Regina because of our friends and the Wascana marsh.—*Dorothy R. Wade*, Northern Illinois University, Dekalb, Illinois.

PROTECTION OF NATURAL WOODLANDS

It may seem unlikely that in the Northwest Territories we will need to worry about the preservation of natural, unspoiled woodlands. The human population is thinly distributed over Canada's vast north and only concentrated in a small number of settlements. Yet those of us who have done considerable travelling in the Northwest Territories and in the northern portions of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have noted with dismay the destruction of forest near settlements. Many northern communities such as Fort Rae, Fond-du-lac, Black Lake, and Brochet, appear as ugly scars from the air. In the past I have bitterly complained to Fort Smith's Town Council about the thoughtless cutting of trees in our settlement. When a new house is built, all trees are bulldozed away and no new trees are planted when the house is completed. Trees are cut everywhere for use as fuel. Because of concern over this destruction, a group of Fort Smith citizens drew up a brief and submitted it to the Town Council.

The introduction to the citizens' brief stated the concern over increasing and indiscriminate cutting of trees. The results of such clearing were deplored—the attendant mud, dust and ugliness, with flowers disappearing and birds retreating. For specific listed reasons, the citizens' group therefore asked for a definite area to be set aside for a natural woodland park. The reasons urged were the natural beauty of this northern boreal forest area overlooking the Rapids of the Drowned on the majestic Slave River, its historic interest, its flora and fauna, the appeal that wilderness holds for tourists, and the prevention of erosion.

The proposal was narrowly approved by Council. Since then, and in order to co-operate with Council, the group has reduced the size of the area requested, to exclude a comparatively inaccessible section of the area that is not travelled. The plea is then for the

protection of a key area near the settlement which is in danger of destruction by motor-cycles and motor-toboggans. The proposal has been forwarded to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, and we hope that administrative problems will be solved and the area set aside within a year.

We have no television in Fort Smith, but we do have other "amenities" of life found in the south, such as lack of concern about natural beauty! However, one interested group of citizens plans to keep a watchful eye on our community.—*Ernie Kuyt*, Fort Smith, N.W.T.

NON-GAME WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

We learn with great interest of the special wildlife investigations unit which has been established in the Department of Fish and Game of the state of California, the second state in the U.S.A. (Arizona being the first in 1967) to act to study and manage non-game wildlife.

The California unit will be involved with the state's rare and endangered wildlife, including shore and water birds associated with rapidly disappearing bay and estuarine habitats and inland marshes. Among the animals that will receive attention are hawks and owls, furbearers such as the ringtail cat, kit fox and fisher, and such endangered species as the California Condor and the Peregrine Falcon.

Most state wildlife agencies have direct and indirect responsibility for the protection and perpetuation of all wildlife. However, their attention is given largely to game species because sportsmen, through their purchase of licences and by the payment of special excise taxes on hunting and fishing equipment, finance almost entirely the operations of state fish and wildlife agencies.

The California unit will cooperate with conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups, universities and

interested individuals in gathering much-needed information about non-game wildlife and their habitats. From the information, the Department of Fish and Game will begin to develop management plans to help "assure maintenance of all species of wildlife for their intrinsic and ecological values, as well as for their scientific and educational use." Could SASKATCHEWAN follow the example of California and Arizona and be the first province in Canada to undertake study and management of non-game species?—*H. C. Moulding, Regina.*

AUDUBON TOUR TO CHURCHILL

This summer I was privileged to join the Canadian Audubon Society's tour of the Churchill area, under the able leadership of Mrs. Helen Lloyd, of the Department of Botany, University of Manitoba. We flew in from Winnipeg, 25 strong, for 10 days of glorious weather spent in wandering over the rocky outcrops, the tundra, and into the fringes of the boreal forest, which reaches to within a very few miles of Churchill. Equipped with H. W. Scoggan's *Flora of the Churchill area* and our favourite bird guides, we set out to see as many birds as we could, and to learn as much as possible about the tundra itself and the wonderful variety of plant life that it offers. In both we were remarkably successful.

Our first sighting was made from the air as we approached Churchill, where, looking straight down into the water, we could see the shapes of the white whales swimming below. These were to become a familiar sight, as the white whales come up the river with every tide after the shoals of small fish on which they feed, and then out again with the ebb-tide. In the space of a few minutes one could count 40 or 50 going by, rising and falling in graceful arcs, and sitting on the rocks out at Cape Merry on a quiet evening you could hear the soft

"whoosh" of released breath as the great creatures surfaced for air.

We saw the exquisitely marked and coloured birds of the north country—the Lapland Longspurs and the Golden Plovers, the Harris' Sparrows, the Water Pipits and the Northern Phalaropes, birds which we had seen before only in migration or not at all, but the greatest thrill of all was the sighting of whole families of Willow Ptarmigan, cock and hen and almost always seven or eight active little brown chicks. All the members were adding up their "lifers"; even the men in the party, enthusiastic and experienced birders all of them, made up to 30 or more. My own count was 33!

The flowers, too, were as beautiful as ever we had read, and the terrain was varied enough that one saw everything from the arctic flora of the great rock outcrops which formed Cape Merry, through the dwarf flowers of the tundra, to the flowers of bog and forest which were to be found no more than 20 miles away. We discovered no less than five varieties of orchids, but the most unforgettable were the white lady slippers and the tiny *Orchis rotundifolia*, an exquisite miniature in mauve and purple, which grew in unbelievable numbers almost everywhere. Others were the spotted saxifrage and the single white chrysanthemums growing in rock crevices (which one could hardly imagine would nourish even moss), the creamy white pyrolas among the scrubby willows and buffalo berries and the eight-petalled dryas turning their faces to the sky like single white roses. Everything grew close to the ground; even the spruce trees at the northern limit were bushy below the snowline, with branches so thickly clustered that you could hardly pass a hand between them, while above grew a thin and scrawny stem, no more than just alive. Along the bleak and inhospitable coast the spruce grew taller, but with the bare trunk turning its back on the ocean, and all the branches streaming inland like wind-blown hair.

Historically, too, the Churchill area was most interesting. At the tip of Cape Merry were the ruins of old Fort Churchill, the old powder magazine, and a cairn to the memory of Jens Munck, one of the earliest explorers to attempt to winter there, and of whose ill-fated expedition only three survived. Directly across the river, which here is over a mile wide, is Fort Prince of Wales, which has been finely restored. It took 40 years to build and was the most up-to-date structure of its kind, but when the French general La Perousse sailed into the Bay it was surrendered without a shot being fired, for a very good reason. Samuel Hearne was caught totally unprepared with only 13 men in the Fort; the rest were all away hunting! Across the river also is Sloop's Cove, where Samuel Hearne's name and the date 1747 are carved on the smooth, glaciated rock.

History is still being made at Churchill, as it is the site of an extensive research station and a rocket range, which, we were told, is operated solely for scientific research and not for any military objectives. One project is the study of the Aurora Borealis. One afternoon we were allowed to watch the launching of a rocket, and afterwards were shown the launching pad and apparatus, then were given a tour of the range, including the telemetry room, where the tracking and recording of data is carried out.

On another interesting excursion we crossed the river in whaling canoes to visit an archeological "dig" where a group of young scientists were excavating the sites of Eskimo dwellings estimated to be 2000 to 2500 years old. They only had to excavate three to four inches, so little debris has accumulated since that time. At the period these were occupied they were only 25 feet above sea level; now the ridge where they are found is 75 above the sea, a rise said to be due to the release from the weight of the Ice Age.

Churchill itself has an extremely interesting Eskimo museum, which in

addition to historical artifacts has many fine examples of present-day cultural products, carvings in ivory and soapstone, painting and design, items in fur and hide, etc. There is also a very attractive Anglican church, which has the distinction of being the oldest building in the area.

Altogether it was an unforgettable ten days, and not the least of its pleasure was the good fellowship of a group of active and enthusiastic people joined together in a common interest. — *Mrs. Mary F. Brennan, Bella Bella, B.C.*

WHIP-POOR-WILL OBSERVED

Several bird-watching friends have informed me that an observation I made about 10 years ago is unusual and worth recording. Although many persons have heard Whip-poor-wills calling, apparently few have seen them in the act. Since they call mainly at night there are few opportunities to study them closely. Although it is now several years since I saw this performance, my companions and I have talked about it many times since.

The observation took place at a cabin at Clear Lake in the St. Donat region of Quebec, about 80 miles northwest of Montreal. Although I don't remember the year, it was in the month of June. Whip-poor-wills had been calling all evening, but one seemed to be calling just outside the cabin and out of curiosity I shone a flashlight through a window and found two birds on the ground beside the cabin. One moved off but the other seemed undisturbed by the beam of light and continued to call for several minutes. It was perched on a small knoll and was sideways to me so my three companions and I had a fairly good view.

When first seen it was calling loudly and repeatedly but it shortly ran out of steam and then subsided with a visible lowering of its head as if exhausted. After a moment it perked up a bit and began a most remarkable

behaviour, apparently sucking air into its air sacs (which my ornithologist friends tell me birds have) in preparation for another series of calls. At any rate, we heard a distinct inhalation sound, as if a bellows were being inflated with the air being held by a check-valve. It did this 15 or 20 times, each time giving a slight movement of its head. Although we were unable to detect any increase in body size it seemed to us that this should have been the case. The bird then commenced calling in the usual way and again, after a long series of calls, we saw it slow its tempo and droop as if exhausted. We watched it go through the pumping and inhalation performance a second time before we withdrew. — *George B. Rutherford*, 7448 Kingsley Road, Apt. 501, Montreal 29, Quebec.

SOME UNUSUAL NESTING RECORDS

In three instances during the 1968 breeding season I found House Sparrows nesting in an abandoned Black-billed Magpie nest. The House Sparrow nests were of the ordinary type: generally oval in shape and made of straw and feathers; the nests of the magpies were one year old. In magpie nests that are only a year old, the roofs have collapsed sufficiently to leave the former inner nest room much smaller in size. Thus the sparrow would have a smaller space to fill up with straw and such material in order to make its regular inner nest of thick feather lining. Sparrows would have little luck in attempting to construct a nest in any magpie nest over two years old as in most cases the roof has collapsed completely, leaving no room whatsoever in which to build a nest.

In most instances, single House Sparrow nests were found, but in one case last year I discovered three nests in one magpie nest, not at all unlike the social weaver bird of Africa. How-

ever, such situations seem rare and a general rule is no more than one nest, or two at the most, per location, although they can and do live in close quarters.

I was surprised to find, on May 18, 1968, the nest of a Common Crow built on top of an old magpie nest. The magpie nest was no more than two years old, the mud bowl of the interior being still in good shape and clearly visible.

Several times in 1967 I found cases of dual-nesting in the House Sparrow. The Valley Centre dance hall located north of Rosetown provides excellent nesting sites under the rows of eaves. Nooks have been formed by the 2 by 4's placed every 15 or so inches apart, providing nesting situations for over 50 nesting pairs. The cleverly constructed duplex-style sparrow nests were built as one unit and thus both pairs of nesting birds must have laboured together or side by side in order to complete their dwellings. Why they went together to construct such a nest is beyond me, as it was certainly not a result of a lack of nest sites. The nesting possibilities in the hall alone are always very numerous. I strongly suspect polygamy as the only other explanation, but this is by no means an established fact.

Robins also nest in many different sites, but one of the strangest Robin nests I have found was supported by an old bed spring nailed vertically over the window of a shed. The nest was a rather bulky structure supported largely by the spring and to some extent by the board holding the spring against the window. A further oddity was the fact that the nest was constructed entirely of grass and similar plant fibres, no mud having been used. This could not be attributed to a shortage of mud, as our nearby garden always provides a good supply. Perhaps it was a good thing that mud was not used because the extra weight could easily have brought the entire nest toppling down, as it was in a rather precarious location.

On May 4, 1968 I began keeping records of a nest of the House Sparrow; on May 9, I was startled to find in the nest a House Sparrow egg and a Starling egg. On that side of the building I checked and recorded several sparrow nests and one Starling nest. The latter nest was located about 20 feet from the sparrow nest, that is, 11 eave sections away, each of these eave sections being capable of housing a nest. My records show that the Starling nest already contained five eggs when that of the sparrow held only one egg—its own. Whether the female Starling entered the nest by accident (which I doubt), purposely dropped it there, or whether it was, in fact, the female of this nest, I do not know, but I have no knowledge of any previous record of Starling eggs having been found in the nest of the House Sparrow or any other bird.—*Wayne Renaud*, Rose-town.

UNUSUALLY LARGE SONG SPARROW CLUTCH

The Song Sparrow is a common resident in Riding Mountain National Park. I found three nests there in 1968 on the ground in dense vegetation. One of these nests, found on June 17 at the base of a clump of nettles (*Urtica* sp.) a mile southwest of the Wasagaming boat cove on Clear Lake, contained eight eggs of this species. The nest was visited three times during the following day; on each occasion the female flushed from the nest, hence she must have been incubating this unusually large clutch of eggs. Unfortunately, I was unable to visit the nest again after June 18.

Margaret M. Nice (*Studies in the Life history of the Song Sparrow*, 1937, Dover ed., 1964: 108-109) states: "Song Sparrow nests contain four eggs in about 50 per cent of the cases, five eggs in about 30-35 per cent, and three eggs in about 15-20 per cent . . . Sometimes there are only one

or two eggs, when Cowbird eggs are present. Once I found six eggs As to the six egg set, I believe this was in the nature of a combination of the second and third set, somewhat as with a young bird the fourth egg that normally goes with the first set sometimes appears in the second."—*David R. M. Hatch*, Oak Lake, Manitoba.

SECOND RECORD OF MOURNING DOVE AT ISLAND LAKE, MANITOBA

On September 27, 1968, Louis Harper and Marius Harper, two of the students in our Junior High, drew my attention to a strange bird on the school grounds. It was easily identified as a Mourning Dove as it was in full view in good light for 10 minutes. The following day the bird was sighted by Roscoe Beardy and Morris Harper. A probable Mourning Dove was sighted earlier at Island Lake by the author in the period between September 24 and October 3, 1965. The light was not good on that occasion, and being a novice at the time, I recorded only that I had seen a "pigeon-like bird with a long tail."

According to Earl Godfrey (1966. *The Birds of Canada*:208) the Mourning Dove breeds in "southern Manitoba (Garland, Shoal Lake, Aweme, Hillside Beach)" but Godfrey also notes that the Mourning Dove wanders widely outside the breeding range, especially in autumn. Ron Penner says it is fairly common at Cross Lake, and Ken and Alex Paupanekis of Norway House are both familiar with the bird.—*A. E. Wilson*, Island Lake.

BLUE JAY BACK COPIES

We have large quantities of some back copies of the *Blue Jay*. These may be used to complete your set or to help you get new members for the society. In other cases we have no back copies and you may be able to supply rare copies. If you can help please write to Gary Seib, *Blue Jay* archives, Box 1121, Regina.

A CRANE VISITOR

On Saturday, October 12, a lone Sandhill Crane appeared in our garden some 30 yards from the house. It flew to the dugout, about 300 yards southwest, but returned walking. It flew over a shelterbelt and alighted in the pasture east of the house where my twin grandchildren and I followed it to get a closer look. To our great surprise is allowed us to "herd" it for a quarter of a mile, at times approaching to within 25 or 30 yards of it. It was not lame and could fly beautifully, which it did for a few yards when we crowded it.

It returned again Sunday flying to the dugout and walking back to the pasture.

Monday noon my wife heard it calling so we went out to investigate and found it circling high overhead. It drifted away to the southeast and I afterwards heard that it was seen by neighbours some three miles away. About 2:30 p.m. it came flying through the yard so I phoned my brother, a camera enthusiast. In the car we were able to get within 30 feet and were able to get several good shots of it.

The crane should be taking off for the south soon for it cannot survive the winter here and too many people would be only too glad to shoot it, but when it leaves we shall certainly miss it.

I missed it for a couple of days but it came into the yard this morning (Sunday, October 20). It shows no alarm but just does not want to be pressed. A moving picture camera would have done better justice to it, especially its take-off. It slowly "cranes" its neck then starts running, taking slow but tremendously long steps until it becomes air-borne.—*Guy C. Coates, Leask, Saskatchewan.*

UNUSUAL — UNUSUAL

Unusual may be an odd form of title but the items I am about to relate are rather unusual under any circumstances.

On a Saturday in August this year my wife and I went to visit one of the old retired pioneer naturalists of this magazine: Mrs. M. Hermansky and her brother, Mr. Theo Martinovsky, who live on the banks of the beautiful Cutarm creek just west of the town of Gerald. While walking through their garden we chanced to see an albino chipmunk, rather tame to say the least. There was only a very faint trace of fawn to indicate the chipmunk streaks. You can rest assured that the four of us had him cornered fairly close for observation, but we had no camera.

On departure we ran into another unusual creature near our parked car, a red-bellied snake *Storeria occipitomaculata occipitamaculata*. F. R. Cook in the Museum's popular series No. 13, *Amphibians and reptiles of Saskatchewan*, states that there is no other Saskatchewan snake that has a red underside, and that it is the smallest. This one was about eight inches long. The *Resource Reader* notes that it grows to about 10 inches. Unfortunately people are often prejudiced against snakes, and we had quite a time to protect this small inoffensive, defenceless little creature from destruction.—*Anthony J. Hruska, Gerald, Sask.*

THE DEER MOUSE AS A NEST COMPETITOR AND POSSIBLE PREDATOR OF THE MOUNTAIN BLUEBIRD

by *Jon E. Swenson, Shepherd, Montana*

As Power (1966:351) has stated, many observers believe that the Mountain Bluebird population is declining in much of its range. Although the following observations neither support nor refute this belief, they do suggest a phenomenon that may on occasion cause a temporary and localized decline in the bluebird population.

For two years records were kept on the Mountain Bluebirds nesting in 16 nest boxes erected in the ponderosa pine covered foothills of the Bull