

Junior Naturalists

Edited by **Joyce Deutscher**, Regina

COMMENTS AND PRIZE WINNERS

Juniors will be pleased to hear that additional space is being made available to them in the Newsletter as well as in the *Blue Jay*. So those of you who have written in and don't see your work on this page be sure to look in the next Newsletter.

Bohdan Pylypec is awarded the prize for the best letter. The prize is a year's subscription to the *Blue Jay*. By the sound of things Bohdan is an accurate and painstaking observer with an eye for detail—all good qualities for a naturalist.

Brian Irving is to be congratulated on his continued interest and has now earned his H.N. (Honor Naturalist), a title given to Juniors who contribute more or less regularly over a period of time.

Send letters any time to Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, 1332 Edward St., Regina. The deadline for the next *Blue Jay* is July 15. By then you should be well into your summer activities and have many interesting experiences to report.

Those of you who make it to the summer meeting of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society be sure to write and tell us about it. We will have a story about last year's meeting in the next Newsletter where one of our members tells us about sleeping on cacti of all things!

A FISH TRAGEDY

by **Patricia Johnson**

(continued from last issue)

After catching about forty minnows we gathered three kinds of plants for our aquarium. We kept the fish in a gallon jar. But even then they were crowded so we put some in a quart jar. At that time we had a goldfish so we gave the minnows some of its food. The water was changed every

morning. The next day I was sent to get some sand.

While I was gone my older sister put one minnow into the gold fish bowl. The poor minnow was scared half to death. When I came in with the sand the minnow was hiding behind a sea shell. The goldfish saw it and started chewing the poor thing up.

The next day all except three fish were in their aquarium. One the goldfish had eaten up, the other two were in their own aquarium for school. In another jar were two snails also for school.

One day we noticed them all at the top of the jar. Then some would turn over on their stomach and sink to the bottom. We were all pretty worried for we had had them for quite a while. Then mom said, "I read a book that said fish ate seaweed". So back to the creek I ran for some water plants. When the fish had seaweed it seemed no more died.

Then one day when I came home from school mom said that a couple more fish had died. The next day mom gave me some food for the fish at school but when I got there the fish were dead. When I got home the fish at home had started to die again. We had to let them die because they had seaweed, fish food, plenty of everything. Then on television that day a man said, "For your aquarium you need a snail to eat the dead fish so they won't poison the water." That told us what our trouble was. Rod and I went down to the creek and brought a snail back with us.

When I went to school in the morning I found the big snail had eaten the little snail. About the day exams started I took my snail home.

During summer holidays mom made a new aquarium for them. Then the snails started eating the live fish so mom said, "Take the fish down to the creek and let them go." And you know I was sort of sad to see them go, but the fish have a life of their own to live in their own home.

HOW OUR RED SQUIRRELS SURVIVED THE HARD WINTER

by Bohdan Pylypec H.N., age 14,

Yellow Creek

Last summer the Red Squirrels couldn't find many hazelnuts because of the early spring frosts so they gathered mushrooms in great numbers and then hung them to dry in many trees surrounding the house. After the mushrooms had dried the squirrels picked up most of them and hid them in their storage rooms. One of the storage rooms turned out to be a bird house which I had made out of an old woodpecker cavity in a log. I had cut the log to a two-foot length and then put a roof and bottom to it. The squirrels had packed the cavity full of mushrooms but by spring all the mushrooms had been eaten.

During the winter I had also noticed that the squirrels sometimes came out of holes in the snow. When the snow began to melt in the spring, I decided that I'd look to see what was in those holes. I found six entrances, three of which were by trees, two by fence posts, and only one in the open. Because the squirrels usually came down the trees and the fence posts into their holes, no tracks could be seen in the snow and thus the squirrels were quite safe from predators.

After digging out the whole network of tunnels, I estimated that the tunnels, which are about two inches in diameter, must be about one hundred and twenty feet in length. The main tunnels ran through dense rose bushes covered with rose hips and had many other tunnels branching from them. Occasionally along the tunnels were pieces of rose hips which the squirrels had eaten, and ice formed from the snow after the squirrels had slept on it. I also found another similar network of tunnels a distance away but this one was slightly shorter.

Another interesting squirrel home which I found was a structure about the size of a basketball, about twelve feet off the ground in the crotch of a willow. This structure was made up mostly of moss and bark on the outside. The inside was made up of pieces of clothing and thin bark. The whole structure was very soft and I imagine

that it must have been quite warm. When the warm weather of spring came, the squirrel moved out of its home.

ARMED INVASION

by Brian Irving, age 14, Kelvington

On the afternoon of January 30, 1965, I was on a hike and came to two granaries, one of which had a large leak. They were positioned on the N.E. quarter of 27-36-12 w2. On inspecting the leak I found that it had been gnawed at and found a track leading into a slough bordered with willows. I followed it and came across a porcupine which was the first one I had seen in the wild.

In early years you very seldom heard of porcupine in this immediate area. Last summer (1964) was the first year they seemed quite common, with people's dogs running into them and some being killed on the roads.

The one in question found shelter at night under some fallen willows and fed on wheat and willow bark during the day. By March 4, it had moved to another shelter but still made its daily visits to the granary. On March 13, I approached the site from another direction and found it feeding on bark in an aspen bluff some one hundred yards from the slough. I proceeded to the granary and found that it was not satisfied to "lick the leak" but had managed to claw a way into the other granary which contained a little wheat. I also found that it had deserted previous shelters and had found another not far away. This suggested that it found shelter in the slough and fed on wheat at the granary and travelled to the bluff to get aspen and willow bark. Between March 13 and 20 it moved on.

About the beginning of February another porcupine was seen feeding in a stubble field. This one stayed until about March 10.

This southwestern movement of mammals has been noticed in other species such as Lynx and Red Fox. Possible sightings of cougars and wolves have been reported in the past years but they are not definite to my knowledge.