

Junior Naturalists

Edited by **Joyce Deutscher**, 7200 6th Ave., Regina



Drawing of a porcupine by Liane Nielsen, age 9, Star Butte School

OUR FIELD TRIP ON MARCH TENTH

by **Liane Nielsen**, age 9, Star Butte School

It was a frosty day about five above. The sky was overcast and the sun shone so dimly it was difficult to see. The wind was calm. Weeds, bushes and trees were frosted. We walked down the road and then cut across the pasture. The snow crackled and crunched under our feet.

When we got to the bush we found a porcupine in a willow tree. He was frightened and clung tightly to the branches. We had quite a time getting him down. He climbed from one willow tree to another and finally fell with a thump to the ground. Then we tried to get a plaster cast of his tracks. After we did this we left the porcupine curled tightly in a ball at the foot of the tree.

RICHARDSON'S GROUND SQUIRREL BEHAVIOUR IN CAPTIVITY

by **Dixie Hobbs**, age 10, Star Butte School

One day we caught two gophers and brought them back to the school. There we put them in a box. We wanted to keep them until they had little gophers but later we found out they were both males.

We kept them in a box that day. The next day we brought a cage into the classroom and put the gophers into it. They kept climbing up the bars to get out. We fed them oats. They sat on their hind legs and nibbled the oats. Once when we were putting one back into his cage he spit out a lot of oats that were in his cheeks.

We fed them oats, orange peel and chocolate bar. They really liked the orange peel. They were noisy and kept

squeaking around their cage. We put a box in their cage and they stayed in it most of the time. We could watch them clean themselves. They sat down like a cat and scrubbed themselves much harder than a cat ever would.

I liked watching them and learned a lot from them. We let them go on the third day.

TAME MAGPIES

by **Ronald Nickel**, Carrot River

A few years ago my brother and I were walking in the bush and we saw a magpie nest. I climbed the tree and looked into the nest and saw some eggs. We went to the nest a few weeks later and saw the eggs had hatched. After the young magpies got larger we took two of them home. We fed them bread soaked in milk.

They soon learned how to fly and became very tame. We gave one magpie away but the other stayed with us all summer. In the fall it flew away and we have not seen it since.

CABBAGE BUTTERFLY IN BASEMENT

by **Colette Isinger**, age 8, Yellow Creek

On April second I found a cabbage butterfly in our basement. Dad and I looked at it and measured a wing span of one inch. The upper side of the wing was white. The underside was light yellow. Each wing had four black spots. Over the winter we had cabbages in the basement. We think that the eggs hatched there.

TREE CROSS-SECTIONS IN CLASSROOM

by **Ellen Kuz**, age 12, Yellow Creek

In our room we have a cross-section of a tamarack, white birch, black spruce, black poplar, balsam fir, jack pine, white poplar and white spruce.

We got these cross-sections from the Department of Natural Resources, Forestry Branch, Prince Albert.

MOUNTED BIRDS IN CLASSROOM

by **Delmer Dutka**, age 12, Yellow Creek

We have three mounted birds in our classroom. There are a Mountain Bluebird, Baltimore Oriole and a Starling.

Gary Oleksyn brought the bluebird and the oriole to school. Gary's mother found the bluebird dead in a granary. Gary's father hit the oriole while driving. Mr. Isinger shot the Starling. The birds were mounted by a taxidermist in Saskatoon.

UNFORTUNATE RED-TAILED HAWKS

by **Derwent Mazur**, age 15, Yellow Creek

Last summer I observed two Red-tailed Hawks' nests that had unfortunate hatches. One of the nests had four eggs, two of which hatched successfully. The reason the other two did not get a chance to hatch was because of heavy rains which caused one side of the nest to fall down, thus tilting the nest. The two young and the two unhatched eggs rolled out. The eggs were broken and the young killed. The parents then left the nest permanently.

In the second nest there were two eggs. Both eggs hatched. I didn't visit the nest for a few days, and when I returned there was only one young left. The second young was successfully raised into an adult, the only bird to be raised out of a total of six eggs in two nests. This is why our Red-tailed Hawk should be protected.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Nature enthusiasts from Yellow Creek again sent in a selection of notes and nature observations. Gary Oleksyn reports that he actually took chase after a red fox but lost sight of it. He feels certain though that the fox came back later for a chicken dinner.

Bob Oleksen took the time to draw the tracks of a white-tailed jack rabbit and to tell about identifying it.

Liane Nielsen, elsewhere in this section, mentions making a plaster cast of animal tracks. We wonder if Bob has thought of doing this as well as drawing the tracks.

Flocks of redpoles were observed by Rosemary Nemeth. She tells us they find seeds and other good things to eat in front of their house.

Colleen Shewchuk had the good fortune to see a porcupine walking all hunched up back and forth across the road. However when it saw the car it decided to head for the ditch.

Bird watcher Deborah Gingara saw a Horned Owl when she was out bike riding. As soon as she got home she started looking up information on it.

Two Snowy Owls were seen by Elsie Nemeth while on a drive to the city. We might remind Juniors that it is a good idea to keep track of the date and place where you see things. Who knows you might just happen on some information which is wanted by someone keeping records of birds and other animals. Perhaps the Snowy Owl you saw was the last one to be seen in the spring and so we have a late migration date for that bird. Also, for your own information, you might want to refer back to your notes to see when you saw certain things.

One of our younger members from Lac la Ronge, Lynn Ernst, wrote a delightful note which she calls "The fish that just about pulled me in". This is her story with its original spelling and punctuation: "Ones i cougth a pike And I frust abroust fell in my mom came to help Me and stumbled over fishline and thene got up and helped me pull him in. She was full of bruises and sckraped on her nease and albose".

Stan Checkel from Coronation, Alberta, describes a bird he was unable to identify. It was seen picking over gravel with a large flock of juncos and tree sparrows. The bird had grey tail and wing feathers, light grey to white abdomen and shoulders, black splotches on the back of its head and back. The underpart of its tail was

white and its beak pinkish like a junco's. It was about the same size as a junco.

And that just about sums up Junior activities for this time. I wonder as I sit here sipping my Labrador tea what plans you have for summer. Certainly when I gathered Labrador tea leaves in the Flin Flon area last summer I had no idea I would be sitting here sipping tea made from them as I read over your letters. If you happen to be strolling through a patch of Labrador tea this summer why not pick a few leaves and dry them? Then sometime in the middle of next winter you can take a teaspoon full of leaves, pour boiling water over them, let steep for a few minutes and then take a sip or two as a reminder of the green woods of summer. And that reminds me, I had my first taste of wild onion for this year on April 30. What wild plants have you been nibbling recently?

Letters, drawings and photographs for the Junior Section should be sent to **Mrs. Joyce Deutscher**, Junior Editor, 7200 6th Ave., Regina to arrive not later than July 15 for inclusion in the next issue of the **Blue Jay**.

NOTE TO JUNIOR NATURALISTS: Frequently articles and stories are submitted by adult contributors that have something of special interest to juniors. Two such stories are printed here so that Juniors will not miss them.

A YOUNG ANTELOPE PET

by **Dave Santy**, Beechy

It was early one morning when Davie Gray set out to spot cattle on his ranch. There was still the cold tang of spring in the air. Trees were budding into leaf and baby calves were being born. There were many predators about to harass them; Davie kept records and where necessary would move mother and offspring to more protected quarters.

Later in the day, having checked the cattle, he headed the horse for home. He hung the reins on the saddle

horn and gave the animal his choice of route. As he rode, he was rudely awakened from a reverie when his horse almost pitched him out of the saddle. The horse had taken an animal path through a clump of buckbrush and something had frightened him. Still thinking of the cattle and that there might be a calf there, Davie urged the horse back through the buckbrush. About midway the horse came to a stop and the rider looked down on two newly-born baby antelope. There was no sign of the mother, so he dismounted. He could not resist the desire to pick one up in his arms, climb onto the saddle, and go for home. As the horse started to move, the little fellow gave out with a bleat that caused the horse to buck in an endeavour to shake them both off.

The Gray ranch buildings are in a good sheltered grove on the first bench down from the top land level. There are many such thickets here that continue down to the South Saskatchewan River about three miles distant. It is scenic territory and habitat for much of the wildlife which can withstand the rigours of Saskatchewan winters. Near here members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society camped in June 1964 for their annual outdoor meeting.

Upon arrival at the ranch buildings, "Bucky" was adopted at once, and Mrs. Gray prepared a feed formula. He was at once one of the family, and became very much at home. Never was he held under restraint, but never did he stray any distance from the buildings. He loved people and would play with children as one of them. For a time in the summer, 18-month-old Marilyn came to be with her grandparents, and Bucky immediately took over as her guardian. They romped together continually. At times he would give a demonstration of speed, and when she responded with a hilarious laugh, he would be off again. He really was a show-off!

If Grandma missed them for a time, she would call for Bucky and he



"Bucky" had many visitors.

would soon appear, herding Marilyn, often nudging her into direction. Marilyn would hold the feed bottle for him. When she considered it her turn for a draught, he would refuse to give it up till she screamed at him.

In the early fall a fire from one of the buildings spread into the trees to the east. The teen-age daughter, Helen, rushed from the house, calling for Bucky. She ran along the edge of the fire, continuing to call. About a hundred yards or so from the buildings, an antelope streaked ahead of the conflagration, passed Helen and carried on down the hills. It paid no attention to Helen's calling, and she returned sadly down-hearted. She told her mother that Bucky had been so badly scared that he would never come back. Her mother assured her that Bucky was safe in the house. He had answered Mrs. Gray's first call and had come in from the west.

In the winter, Mr. and Mrs. Gray spent a few weeks with their married daughter in Calgary, and returned to find Bucky dead. During their absence the ranch chore one day was grinding grain for feed. Bucky had been around the mill, constantly licking the fine powdered grist of the mill, and this was probably his undoing. Such seems to be the fate of so many of the animals of the wilds we think we are befriending.

"PLASTIC SURGERY" FOR A CROW

by R. D. Thompson, Wisconsin

The appearance of a red-winged crow would cause a mild sensation in any area among bird watchers and non-bird watchers alike. And it was no exception when such an apparition turned up in my home town in Wisconsin.

However, this was no freak of nature — but the result of a 14-year-old boy's life-long fascination with wildlife, a budding interest in photography and an insatiable appetite for model aeroplane building.

After observing and trying to make a picture sequence of young crows, I had succeeded in getting shots of the nest building and the eggs, and was attempting to get near enough, amid the loud protests of the parent birds, to take pictures of the nestlings. My movement startled a young but fully feathered crow on the ground near by. He had been ejected from another nest, and still couldn't qualify for sustained flight. He was easily captured and I proudly carried him home. Fortunately, I had a patient mother, who by this time had been conditioned to accepting most anything into the house that crawled, loped or flew, and it wasn't too difficult to convince her that this fellow was needed to continue my photo study of crows.

Realizing that he would soon be capable of full flight, I clipped the primaries and a few of the secondary feathers on his right wing in order to keep him grounded. In my inexperienced haste to accomplish this, I clipped the feathers far too short and as a result the poor crow, who by this time had acquired the name "Fagan", could not keep his balance on a perch and would invariably end up hanging head down.

Having inflicted an almost insufferable indignity on him, I felt responsible for rectifying it. Remembering the freshly killed carcass of a Red-tailed hawk I had found a few days previous, I returned to find it still there. After carefully removing the primaries and secondaries from

the right wing, I took them home and brought into play all the skills of a 14-year-old model aeroplane enthusiast.

The stubs of the feather shafts were still in the crow's wing, of course, and it was relatively easy to insert a new feather into the hollow stub of the old one. I remember painstakingly matching and making sure the hawk's feathers were inserted at the proper angle. When certain I had a good match I cemented them in place with aeroplane glue and wound the shaft with fine thread.

I took him outside and launched him, with some hesitation, half expecting him to fall to the ground in a hopeless tangle of feathers. My fears were groundless. He sailed from my hand, gained altitude, circled as if making tests of his own and came in for a landing on the ground nearby.

I think his freedom was guaranteed from that instant, and though he was not confined again he remained for a time, flying around the neighbourhood and generating no little interest.

He flew off finally, as all wildlings do if given the choice, and I am sure that mother nature saw to an eventual, more conventional wing replacement.

JUNIOR NATURALISTS

I have been pleased to note that the children's section in the *Blue Jay* has been continued and I would like to see it expanded to include articles of especial interest to young folk.

A few months ago I was in the Hinsdale area, Montana and had the delightful experience of calling at a rural school, and talking to the teacher and her pupils. Before I left I invited them to take out a school membership in the SNHS. Which they were happy to do. It made a difference to be able to tell them that there was a section in the publication especially for young people and that they could write and tell of their class expeditions and their discoveries in nature.—*Ruth M. Chandler, Shaunavon.*