

Letters

LYNX AND MOUNTAIN

LION

Hugh Hedger of Dinsmore writes (November 6, 1964) that "there have been several lynx seen in the district this year, in fact more than last year," and that about ten miles east of Dinsmore "a mountain lion has been 'raising cane' with some of the farmers' cattle all year long. It has only been seen once, but has been stampeding cattle, driving them through fences and corrals all year long. It has killed three calves so far and could be responsible for the shortage of deer in the area."

Genevieve Belliveau of Ethelton sends a clipping from the Melfort Journal about a lynx attempting to capture a domestic goose on September 12, 1964, at the home of George Major of St. Brieux. The Major children, with considerable alertness, managed to shoot the raider. A photograph in the newspaper leaves no doubt as to the identity.

OBSERVATIONS OF RED FOX PUPS

On June 7, 1964 I came upon some Red Fox pups near a wheat bin on our farm. By approaching stealthily I got within 15 feet of them and observed them for quite a while before they saw me—then, with a yelp they ran under the bin. This fox family must have moved in several days earlier, as the long grass was well trodden down and there were quite a few mice, remains of ducks, and even the head of a cat which we had shot during the winter. Determined to get pictures, I made several trips to their den. Once two adults ran in opposite directions when I was several yards from them. The pups just showed their black noses from under the bin, and once I picked up a small stick and touched one gently on the nose, whereupon it grabbed the stick and growled while we had a little tug-of-war. Next I picked up a duck bone and one took it from my hand, never showing more than the tip of its nose. As I was leaving I saw the adult coming home

with a duck. The next day they were gone.

About a month later my husband found that they were living in an old badger hole. Armed with my camera I set out to get pictures. By coming in from behind some brush and then crawling about 20 feet through long grass, I was able to get to within six feet of them. This time there were only two pups, both sitting scanning the horizon. When I starting winding the film, the sound seemed to fascinate them, for they stood up and held their heads to one side as if to listen, and came another foot closer to me. I got two pictures before one ran down the hole and the other took off into the bush.

They were gone the next day, but I have the pictures I went after; in addition, I have a memorable recollection of one of the pups eating grasshoppers, and crickets.—*Mrs. P. Churchman, Ellesboro.*

MISSHAPEN ANTLERS



Several years ago an adult male White-tailed Deer was shot in the Dirt Hills south of Oungre. The rack of horns showed two very mismatched antlers. The left side of the head bore a symmetrically branched rack with three prongs as well as the terminal point. The right side carried an antler of matching length, but the terminal point instead of curving outwards followed the curve of the first antler

and had but the one prong! We were at a loss for an explanation, especially as we could see no injury.

When we ate the meat, however, the lead of a .22 calibre bullet was found. Since the animal had been shot with a 38-40 Winchester, and since there was no sign in injury in the spot, it was reasoned that it had received the .22 bullet the previous hunting season. It was remembered that the hindquarter from which the steak had been cut was on the side of the animal opposite the deformed antler.

According to Dr. F. F. Darling in his book *A Naturalist on Rona*, this injury could have accounted for the antler not developing properly: "The bodily condition of the stag is reflected in the antlers that grow in the year following an injury, when the antler on the opposite to that of an injury is reduced in size and malformed in more or less direct relation to the seriousness of the hurt. It is not easy to understand this close correspondence between injury and the growth of one antler only, but given the fact, the change in side is an obvious consequence of the lateral bundles of nerves crossing over at the base of the skull before passing into the brain proper."— *Mrs. W. G. Durr, Bromhead.*

PRELUDE TO SILENCE

The adjectives "lonely," "barren," "desolate" are so often applied to our prairies. And with each new voice of the wild silenced in the name of progress, there will be one more reason to use those terms. Long gone, the call of the Whooping Crane, the plaintive coo of the Kit Fox. Going, the purling cry of the Sandhill Crane, the prairie symphony of the Coyote.

There were long years of silence after the last all-out campaign against the coyote, but gradually the land was re-awakening to the occasional coyote chorus. Then: in December, 1964 a local newspaper carried a sentence (and obituary) on the coyote—the column ran unbroken almost the full length of the page, listing the localities where poison bait was to be put out in the Swift Current-Shaunavon areas. Is this a sweeping blue-

print for all other areas where the coyote has made a partial return? Is it necessary? Could an awakened ecological conscience give parole?— *J. David Chandler, Masefield-Shaunavon.*

SCREECH OWL AT MARGARET, MANITOBA

On December 21, 1964 I had the good fortune to capture a Screech Owl in our farm poultry house, at about 10.30 p.m. It had given the hens a bad scare, but did not touch them. I took it to the house for examination—it was an owl of the gray phase and measured about 9 inches. As this was my first observation of this small owl, I consulted Peterson's guide to make positive identification. It was then taken outside and released.—*E. J. Bud White, Margaret, Man.*

SHARP-TAILED GROUSE DANCING GROUND

We have a sharptail dancing ground over a mile from our buildings and mornings and evenings you can hear them from spring to fall. One day last spring the teacher from our local school came out with my wife when she brought supper to the field near the dancing grounds and I suggested they take a look at the birds performing. As they drove over with the car, I saw a big flock fly away, but when they drove to the other side there were still over 50 carrying on with the dance. One lit within ten feet of the car.

When the birds are dancing they pay no attention to the boys and me if we have the tractor. This fall we loaded some prairie wool bales right close to them and they just kept on with the dance. There were two other dancing grounds I know of in the district that were broken up in late years, so they have perhaps all moved on to mine. My dancing ground was slated for wheat land too, but I've a notion to leave them their meeting place. We've never advertised the grounds as we thought it would make a too rewarding site when upland game bird season opens in the fall.— *C. K. Greene, Elbow.*

BIRDWATCHING AT ITUNA

The pursuit of "birdwatching," when confined to the listing of species, is often criticized as superficial, but I have had many unexpected thrills over years of watching birds. There was the early June day when the big slough in the flats was black with scores of Northern Phalaropes, bobbing and swimming on the bright water. Once it was a pair of Buffleheads slanting to the small slough behind the house, and once—thrill of a lifetime—a pair of Wood Ducks, lovely in their migration plumage.

One spring we had a number of Harris' Sparrows in their jaunty black. We had never before heard their call notes, which were quite distinctive. Two years ago, Hawk Owls appeared on the farm and nested there—not just one pair, but two, another first. A year ago, I saw a family of White-winged Crossbills in late August, feeding on ripe sunflower heads. This spring I planted sunflowers, hoping to attract them to my garden, but never had a glimpse of any! The same fall I saw an American Redstart for the second time in my life, the first time being many years ago on a chilly October day when the first snow was falling.

This last summer brought its new experiences too. On the farm a new bird was seen and heard a number of times; from its size and appearance obviously a flycatcher, and from its somewhat raucous call we identified it tentatively as a Crested Flycatcher. This led me to look more closely at a small flock which had been frequenting the area around my town home. They too were flycatchers, gray-plumaged with yellow underparts. There were about a dozen in the flock, and they stayed around for nearly a month, but I was never quite positive about their identity. I shall be looking for them next spring!—*Mary F. Brennan, Ituna,*

BLIZZARD LOSSES

At 7:00 a.m. on December 15, 1964 the 36-hour blizzard started, with a temperature of -25° and a wind of up to 70 miles per hour. Out of a small flock of pheasants, three cocks and 10 hens, one hen survived and is still here one month later. Before the storm I

could see 100 pheasants some days, now maybe one to 10. What pheasants are left moved into the farm yards and are being fed by the farmers. The gray partridge weathered the storm better, but with a big loss. Two days after the blizzard I saw several with lumps of snow frozen on their backs and two with their feet frozen off, although all could still fly. They are trying to feed along the roads.

On January 14, 1965 I saw one sage hen; its condition looked good. We seldom see them this time of year—*C. H. Shulver, Woodrow.*

INJURED WHOOPING CRANE

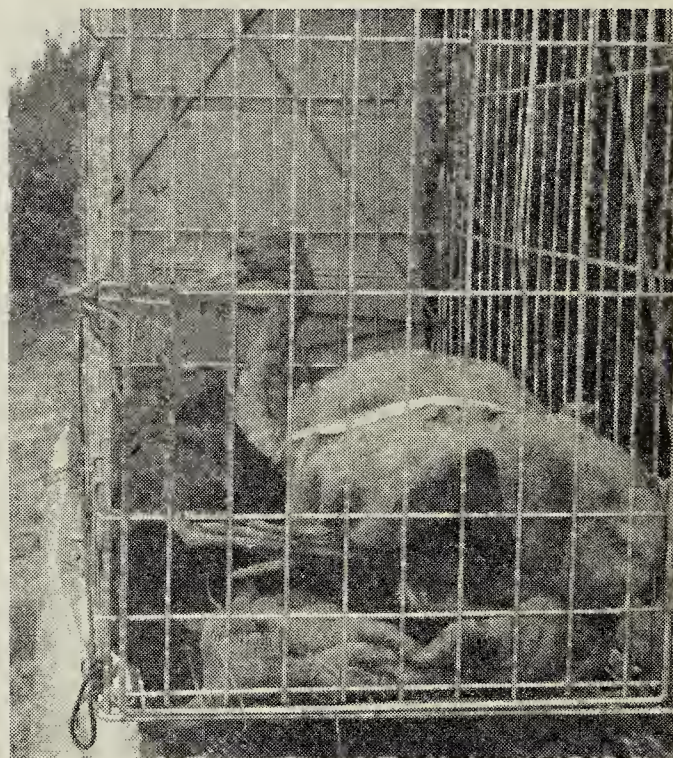


Photo by E. Kuyt

Injured Whooping Crane, Sass River, N.W.T., September 11, 1964

The snapshot shows the young Whooping Crane that Nick Novakowski and I picked up on the breeding grounds in Wood Buffalo Park, N.W.T. on 11 September 1964. This is the bird that was seen by Novakowski on an earlier trip. The bird suffered from a dislocation in the gleno-humeral articulation, **not**, as was reported in the U.S. press, from a fractured wing. The dislocation caused the right wing to "droop" and the bird repeatedly stepped on the trailing primaries, probably arresting healing of the injury. After catching the bird, which was done without difficulty when it tripped over a log, we bundled it in a sack and placed it in a metal dog-crate

alongside the helicopter (see photo). It was remarkably tame. I was struck by its brown appearance especially when the wings were folded in place. Droppings of the crane were purplish and contained seeds of berries (probably a species of blueberry). The bird appears to be making good progress in the Wildlife refuge in Colorado. Mr. Novakowski tells of the rescue of the crane in Audubon magazine (in press).—*E. Kuyt*, Can. Wildl. Serv., Fort Smith, N.W.T.

UNUSUAL LOCOMOTORY BEHAVIOUR OF A GREBE

In the summer of 1935 a companion and I while using a rowboat on Madge Lake in Duck Mountain Provincial Park encountered a grebe, probably a Rednecked Grebe, which demonstrated an unusual means of movement. Essentially, when crowded into shallow water it escaped by apparently running along the bottom. We stood up in the boat, after the grebe had dived, and in the clear, shallow water (18 to 24 inches in depth) could see the grebe outlined against the light-colored bottom of the lake. We noted, as I clearly recall, that the head was thrust forward and the entire outline was streamlined as the bird moved quickly along the bottom. It appeared to be "running" on the bottom, for "puffs" of disturbed sediment approximately three or four feet apart were noted where the bird's feet had apparently touched the bottom. It is usual for the feet to be used in swimming, but on this occasion the grebe seemed to us to be deliberately striking the bottom for a better purchase and a faster speed.—*Walter H. Crocombe*, Kamsack.

HUNTING HABITS OF THE GOSHAWK

I would like to see articles like Glen Fox's "Notes on the western race of the Pigeon Hawk" on all the birds of prey native to the prairies, for example, the Goshawk. This bird is not common in our area, but some falls we see a few. They sometimes attempt to catch pigeons here, and I have been amazed at the speed they can attain in a short distance. A

pigeon is a fairly fast bird when pursued, but on different occasions I have seen a Goshawk catch up with one three or four times, and the pigeon managed to get away only because of its agility in dodging. Apparently the Goshawk cannot keep this speed up for long, as he soon lands somewhere near and waits for the pigeon to settle again. It's easy to see that birds such as partridge, grouse and pheasant would not have much chance with this hawk as they cannot turn and manoeuvre very quickly.—*Sig O. Jordheim*, White Bear.

WRENS IN GLASS JARS

Having seen House Wrens build their nests in the oddest places, I had the idea of inducing them to build in a glass jar. I had one in 1963 and one in 1964, and could see the nest all the time and keep a daily check on its progress. I kept the jar covered and when I wished to look at it, just uncovered the nest and there were the seven eggs which hatched into seven fledglings. The mother bird never seemed to mind my looking at her nest and would return as soon as I had got ten paces away. Ever since I was a boy at school I have been interested in birds and their nests, and I now have a collection of different small birds' nests which many school children and their teachers have seen displayed on a long table in my basement.—*Auguste Viala*, Prince Albert.

AGILE HOUSE SPARROW

A *Blue Jay* note on "Interesting feeding behavior of the House Sparrow" (Dec., 1961), made me wonder whether the behaviour I saw about seven years ago would be of interest. A female sparrow, in trying to reach some weed seeds along our garden fence, would hang head downwards from the wire fence, pick at the weeds for a while, then drop to the ground. Sometimes, in order to reach the seeds, she hung by both feet, sometimes only by one. This performance was repeated several times, and for a couple of weeks we saw one sparrow do this many times.—*Genevieve Belliveau*, Ethelton.