

Bird watcher Deborah Shawchuk saw a blackbird in the engine room while Evelyn Gypchuk tried unsuccessfully to nurse a blackbird with a broken wing back to health. A happier story comes from Kenneth Mazur who reports that a pair of bluebirds successfully raised a family in the bird-house in their back yard. Meanwhile Eugenia Koval was concerned about a family of Mallards which were separated by some dogs. She hopes the mother was able to find the young ones again. A happy ending was reported by Joan Popiel who nursed a chickadee with a missing toe back to health.

Idelle Swicheniuk relates how their class studied about the Sharp-tailed Grouse after their teacher, Mr.

Isinger, brought one to school. Bobby Oleksyn claims they knew it was a grouse by the feathers on its legs. Among other things the students learned that the grouse is the bird emblem of Saskatchewan.

And that just about sums up what Juniors have been doing recently except for Tom Nykyforuk of Saskatoon who drew a Bohemian Waxwing. Tom is eight years old and his drawing very clearly showed the crest on the waxwing's head. Keep up the good work Juniors. We enjoy hearing from you.

Letters for the Junior Section of the *Blue Jay* should be mailed to Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, 7200 - 6th Avenue, Regina, to arrive not later than April 15 to be in time for the June issue.

## Letters and Notes

### GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN?

Mr. C. E. Pegg of Claremont, Ontario in the *Oshawa Naturalists' Club Bulletin Supplement*, December, 1966 reported on a trip to western Canada. His family stopped at the Museum of Natural History in Regina which he said "is one of the finest in Canada". They were greeted there by Mrs. E. Cruickshank, who accompanied them to see Burrowing Owls at Richardson.

During the trip Mr. Pegg saw 200 species of birds and some of these are mentioned in the account, e.g., Clay-colored Sparrows, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Black-billed Magpies and Lark Buntings near Estevan; Brewer's Sparrows, Lark Sparrows and Rufous-sided Towhee near Stewart Valley; Sharp-tailed Grouse and Eastern and Western Kingbirds near Swift Current; Baird's and Savannah Sparrows, Long-billed Curlew and Upland Plover north of Piapot; Red Crossbills, Audubon Warblers, Oregon Juncos, Dusky Flycatchers and Mountain Bluebirds in the Cypress Hills.

On July 14 in the Cypress Hills Provincial Park he records as follows:

"In a long grass meadow, I flushed a flock of grouse. There was one adult and eight young grouse about half grown. The tails of these birds were short, dark and rounded as they flew. The adult bird was more barred than speckled. I believe they were Prairie Chicken, now a rare species in the west."

### INCREASE IN SHARP-TAILS

A few days ago [letter of January 30, 1967] I saw an encouraging sight. We were pulling on to Highway No. 15 north of our home and we noticed grouse to the northwest of us; then we looked to the northeast and there were many more. Mary and I began to count and we went past 40. These birds were on the crest of two hills beyond us and we believe there were more we couldn't see. I had never seen grouse on these hills before, although we have always seen flocks of a dozen or less along the highway in winter.

I remembered having seen unusual numbers of sharp-tails back in my school days. I looked up my records—

and found that on February 15 and 16, 1947, 42 grouse were feeding on stubble across the road from home in 30° weather. That was the only other large congregation I have seen.

While digging in the records of that winter, I came across numerous observations of coyotes, and plentiful flocks of partridge and grouse, sighted nearly every day. This winter, in the immediate vicinity of our home, there have not been any grouse, but a flock of nine gray partridge visit the bale track occasionally. I haven't sighted a coyote so far this winter, but have two rabbits and two fox.—*Lawrence Leckie, Bladworth.*

## OBSERVATIONS OF ORIOLES NESTING

In mid-July, 1965, we observed a female Baltimore Oriole taking a fine thread left on the clothesline from a wind-blown sheet. The male had been heard and seen for several days close to the house. Eager to help, we tied strands of grey mending wool to the line. They were promptly accepted. The female bird's dexterity in untying single and even double knots was fascinating. A falling yarn was almost always retrieved before it struck the ground. We offered coloured wools of the same size and texture — red, blue, green, purple, black, brown and orange. All were rejected, with no interest being shown in them at all. Coarser wool or string was not taken. This was tried each day. Only once, after several hours when nothing else was offered, were a fine black and a fine dark red yarn accepted. But she could hardly wait for pastel yarns to be placed on the line. Why did she consistently refuse the brightly-coloured yarns?

The nest was in the top of a 15-foot elm in the shelter belt and like the clothesline visible from my kitchen, so observation was easy. It took almost exactly two minutes from the time she left the line with yarn until she re-

turned for more. If none was there she waited a few moments, then went elsewhere, but a fresh offering would cause her to return in short order. Work went on for a half to three-quarters of an hour, followed by a rest or feeding time of up to two hours.

At no time was the male observed at the clothesline, bringing other material, or helping in the nest building. In fact, he was never seen closer than six feet from the nest. But he did stay near the site, and was alarmed if we ventured too near. After five days the nest appeared complete.

When the young hatched we were interested to note the male was most active in feeding the nestlings. The two birds took distinctly different areas for foraging. The male was observed always flying directly from the nest over all surrounding trees and sloughs to a wooded pasture about one-third of a mile away; he always returned in the same "bee line" to the nest. Meanwhile the female was never seen away from the shelterbelt.

After a week of increasingly noisy chatter from the young birds, we found four young orioles in the tree branches near the nest. The parent birds were now never far away, and seemed apprehensive of danger. Food was brought frequently, and in spite of loud calls each fledgling seemed to get his dinner in turn. Gradually the calling stopped, though we frequently saw the young birds for the next two weeks. They had probably become proficient in securing their own food.

In the summer of 1966 we again put our yarn offerings on the clothesline but they were steadily ignored by orioles, although we knew one pair at least to be nesting near by. Eastern Kingbirds did show interest, but were easily discouraged if yarn was even loosely attached, and if it fell from the line they refused to carry it, even though they would fly down to it.—*Mrs. J. Drinnan, Grenfell.*



## MAURICE STREET

I wish to express my sincere thanks to all the kind friends and members of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society who sent their kind words of sympathy in the sudden passing of my brother Maurice, October 27, 1966. And special thanks to Dr. and Mrs. Stuart Houston, who drove 400 miles to attend the services, and also to Dr. and Mrs. Stan Riome, who so kindly invited all who attended the service to their home.—*Stan J. Street, 3724 Happy Valley Rd., Victoria, B.C.*



The above photo, taken at Maurice's grave, shows the little white spruce and the Chipping Sparrow nest as mentioned in Dr. C. S. Houston's tribute to Maurice G. Street in the December, 1966, *Blue Jay*.

## HUGE BALD EAGLE

One always regrets to hear of a Bald Eagle being killed but sometimes a predator has to be eliminated. Clare Burt in *Canadian Farm Digest* (July-August, 1966) describes a Bald Eagle killed north of Toronto about 80 years ago because it was stealing lambs.

This eagle, now on display in a pet store at Oak Ridges, is 34 inches long from top of head to tip of tail, it is 13½ inches across the back and it had a wing spread of nearly 13 feet. It is good to know that this exceptionally large eagle has been preserved. Here in Saskatchewan we think we have a large eagle if it has a wing span of seven feet.—*Dave Santy, Beechy.*

## WHERE DO OUR EASTERN BLUEBIRDS COME FROM?

Margaret Belcher mentions in her article in the last *Blue Jay* that there is doubt as to just HOW the Eastern Bluebirds find their way into Saskatchewan. If you read the Junior Section of the *Blue Jay* you will remember that our Juniors' annual report has mentioned several times that our nest lines cannot get the Eastern species any further west than Virden, 47 miles west of Brandon. Also, none of us has seen any of the Eastern any further west than that town, despite the fact that I make several hundred runs west and east to Broadview, each year, and even have the section men on the watch for "red-breasted" bluebirds for me.

In discussing this with the Juniors, we have about decided that the Easterns must fan out across the west country as they approach the northern states, and *then* proceed more or less north into Saskatchewan and Alberta. This might account for the fact that we never see bands of Easterns coming north in the spring—those that do use our nests just seem to appear from nowhere—whereas the Mountains definitely do work their way north and west through Manitoba. One of my fellow train men, motoring down from Saskatoon to Brandon last spring to resume his work here, tells me that all through the trip down, he met small bands of Mountain Bluebirds, all of which seemed to be heading northwest. He thought he might have seen around 200 during his trip.—*Jack Lane, Brandon.*



## BELLIGERENT GOPHER

The following almost unbelievable occurrence took place one sunny afternoon on this past September, on a farm 2 miles south of Moose Jaw.

Mr. David Swayn, while cultivating a field, covered over the opening of a gopher hole, leaving the frantic gopher (Richardson's Ground Squirrel) on the outside. Immediately a large buteo hawk (unidentified), swooped down and caught his prey; a struggle ensued, the big bird quawked as if in pain and let the gopher drop, then flew away. At once another hawk came in for the kill, and the same strange performance was repeated, with the gopher coming out victorious.

Mr. Swayn got off his tractor and walked over to the gopher, thinking that it would be in bad shape and he would have to end its misery. The animal saw him coming and rose up on its hind legs, squealing at him in a very belligerent manner. Seeing no visible wounds, and deciding that this particular gopher was well able to take care of himself, the man prudently withdrew. — *Joanne Brodie, Moose Jaw.*

## "WHISTLING" RABBITS

Mammal watchers who have followed the discussion about an apparent whistling vocalization by the snowshoe rabbit (*Blue Jay*, September 1963, p.105 and March 1964, p.36) will be interested in a report in the August 1966 *Journal of Mammalogy*. Donald L. Forcum notes that while observing mating behaviour of some captive snowshoe rabbits he heard a male utter a "chirp or birdlike warble that is difficult to describe." Whether or not this is analogous to "whistling" is uncertain, but it does indicate that snowshoe rabbits can emit unusual sounds. — *Robert W. Vero, Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg.*

## NORTHERN FLYING SQUIRREL

At various times I have noted articles in the *Blue Jay* on the subject of Flying Squirrels. Bud White of Margaret, Manitoba, a fellow member of our Brandon society, enquired about other sightings in his letter to the *Blue Jay*, March 1964.

On November 12, 1966, Mamie McCowan and I drove to the Brandon Hills (1575 feet altitude), ten miles south of Brandon. Deer tracks were numerous, also rabbit and mice tracks. There were Black-capped Chickadees about and a Blue Jay. In an oak tree, numerous thereabouts, there was an old bird's nest roofed over completely with grass in an elongated cylindrical form. I gave the tree a bunt and out came a flying squirrel. It scurried up the tree about six feet and stayed there as long as we watched. It had big eyes, small ears set back on the head, broad flat tail, grayish fur, fur-covered membrane between front and hind legs. We had a good look at it from all angles and thought that it looked sleepy and cold.—*Mrs. Barbara Robinson, 1441-8th St., Brandon.*

## RODENTS FEEDING ON BIRDS



There have been several notes in the *Blue Jay* about mammals feeding on birds. The accompanying picture shows a Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel eating a Clay-colored Sparrow.—*E. N. Dandridge, Birtle, Manitoba.*



## A NEW MENACE TO WILDLIFE

The latest invention which is being used with deadly effect against coyotes, foxes, bobcats, as well as (in the north at least) deer and moose is a contraption locally known as a "skidoo". It is a small and easily manoeuvrable type of bombardier, or gasoline-powered toboggan, equipped with tracks, which can go anywhere over snow or ice and attain a speed which is capable of following an animal close enough to play it out, and eventually kill it by simply bashing into it, and breaking its back.

I am told that if the first blow does not kill the animal, the second surely will. I am also told that a coyote will usually make a burst of speed toward a bluff, and from this it must be dislodged, but after it has done this a time or two it will not budge and can easily be approached on foot and shot with a .22 rifle.

The "skidoo" has many advantages over the old method of hunting with a team and one-bob sleigh, inasmuch as the hunter could not follow his hounds closely, and was often held up by fences, causing considerable loss of time, as the driver had either to let down the wire or cut it with pliers, to the annoyance of his neighbours. The skidoos, however, can be put out of gear and manhandled quite easily *under* the fence, and the chase resumed.

Foxes, they tell me, are harder to get, because they are less apt to run straight and will jinx back and forth so rapidly that they can avoid the skidoo and often go to earth. Apparently several hunters are more successful in this chase of foxes as I have been told that on the open plains three or four will work together, surrounding Reynard and eventually killing him.

There are masses of mice about, and you only have to see the riddled grass, the thousands of tunnels, and the ragged floors of the bluffs (after the snow goes) to realize just how many. So it behooves us to stop the indiscriminate slaughter of their

enemies — hawks, owls, weasels, bobcats, coyotes and (in the north) that peer of mousers, the timber wolf.

Some hunters skin their kills to make a few dollars, but many do not. They are town and city people out for thrills at the expense of our wildlife and wouldn't take the price of a pelt for the unpleasant job of flaying and stretching it. One wonders if the supply of animals will last long enough, in any case, to pay for a skidoo, for we hear this model advertised at about \$1300!

It is to be hoped that after enough breakdowns, the craze will die out. If not, and at the rate the Eskimos are getting skidoos, the effect of this kind of hunting on caribou and wolves in the Arctic will rival that of the repeating rifle. In fact, half a dozen determined poachers with these vehicles could probably kill off all that are left of our musk-ox in a single winter.

While governments usually hesitate about passing repressive legislation, they might well consider some law to regulate this unsporting type of hunting. Even farmers, who want to protect their poultry, are for the most part indignant about the skidoos. They are the ones who suffer from the depredations of mice, and anyway they don't care to have all sorts of people rushing around their fields. We need legislation against this destruction, and strict enforcement of the law.—*R. D. Symons, Silton.*

## SASKATCHEWAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING

The Saskatchewan Archaeological Society Annual Meeting will be held in the Museum of Natural History Auditorium, Regina, commencing Friday evening, April 21, through April 22, and closing with a proposed field trip to Last Mountain House on Sunday, April 23, 1967. For further information, contact W. H. Long, Secretary-Treasurer, 857 Elphinstone Street, Regina.