

Junior Naturalists

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

FROM YOUR NOTE AND MINE

As I write this it is mid January and an ambitious young fellow walks down the road on his skates on his way to a sheet of ice where he promptly falls, struggles up and falls again. Perhaps by March when you read this the crows will be winging back and the boy will have learned to skate.

My notes tell me that by March 15 last year the wet of the melting snow had encouraged some of the plants along its edge to show the greenness of spring and with careful search the fresh green rosettes of the leafy musineon (*Musineon divaricatum*) could be found. The leaves of the musineon as they expand are carrot-like, the flowers tiny yellow ones grouped closely together in a flattish head or a compound umbel as the botanists prefer to say it. You will find this early spring flower described in *Prairie Wildflowers*, by Lloyd Carmichael, a good book for Juniors who are just starting to learn the identification of prairie flowers.

Ten days after searching out my first musineon last year, I was nibbling the yet unopened buds of the poplar tree. The Sharp-tailed Grouse who had been enjoying the buds were startled away by my approach. I knew the buds of the poplar tree were an emergency food suitable for humans but soon decided that this was no emergency.

On March 27 I found my first mushrooms of the year. The careful drawing I made of them remains unidentified but it helps me recall the freshness and bright orange color of my find.

A week later the red stigmas of the hazel-nut had appeared in "The Valley of the Mushroom." Here is another early spring flower for you to look for; if you know where there are tree squirrels, chances are you can find the hazel-nut shrubs as well. They bloom

in the southern part of the province about the end of April. The male flowers are in catkins which are produced before the leaves develop. The slender red stigmas of the female flowers are quite noticeable. The edible nuts are ripe in August but chances are some squirrel or chipmunk has found them first.

How interesting notes are to look back upon! My earliest records date back to when I was ten years old and read like this:

"mar 15 kicked jacks rubber up the isle

"march 16 jack kiked my rubber up the isle

"mar 17 jack put some paper down my nek."

Apparently I was not too interested in nature when I was ten years old. The notes however still make good reading. Do make it a special project of yours this spring to keep a diary or a note book. The notes are for your own enjoyment and use, so even if your teacher does not see fit to give you above a "D" in composition on your report card keep a nature note book anyway.

A ten-year-old from Yellow Creek, Gaylene Mazur, would rather talk about squirrels than boys. She tells us, "We have a pet squirrel that lives in the barn. We made friends by giving it food like peanuts. The squirrel used to run away at first. Now when you give it food, the squirrel folds its hands across its stomach and watches you." It seems to me, Gaylene, that looking after a pet squirrel is a much better hobby than kicking a boy's rubbers up the aisle.

The eleven-year-old girls from Yellow Creek don't mention boys either. Iris Simon found a cabbage butterfly which couldn't wait until spring flying around in their basement. She used the *World Book* to help her identify it. Deborah Shewchuk had a less happy experience. She saw three dead

porcupines on the road, an adult and two young. As for Colleen Shewchuk (this young lady doesn't give her age), she has been rabbit watching.

BRIEF ENCOUNTER WITH DEER

by Mary Gilles, Moose Jaw

There was a flash! Then a dash! What did I see? I saw a white-tailed deer.

Our family was on a picnic. I was going back to our car ahead of others. As I trudged across the prairie I happened to glance at a small thicket. I saw the deer there! I did not see it for very long but one glance was enough.

It lifted its graceful head, took one whiff of the air, flashed its tail, and ran. The deer ran fast, very fast indeed. Smaller and smaller it grew until it was only a speck on the horizon.

I turned slowly and somewhat sadly. Never again would I see such a magnificent creature.



White-tailed Deer
Drawn by Mary Gilles

SOME JUNIORS GET STUNG

Both Ellen Kuz and Kenneth Mazur saw wasps. Ellen stood by and watched her cousin get stung and then got stung as well. Kenneth states, "This summer I found some wasps in a manure pile. They were Yellow Jackets. I was going to get rid of them and plugged the entrance in the manure pile. They got mad at me and stung me. Then I left them alone until they were gone. I looked inside and saw how the wasps chewed a hole in the manure pile and how they built their nest." And there Kenneth's story ends abruptly leaving us to wonder just how did the wasps build their nest. Perhaps the wasps came back before Kenneth finished his observations.

THE YEAR OF THE WEASELS

Yellow Creek naturalists are full of weasel stories. That is, all except that girl trapper, Rosemary Nemeth, who runs a trapline three-quarters of a mile long. Last year she caught five weasels; this year she is catching everything except weasels. However, weasels are around notes Bryon Lane who saw one in his back yard carrying a dead rat. Glen Orenchuk watched some dogs trying to dig a weasel out of the snow (Girl trappers take note, Glenn considered "his" weasel too beautiful to trap).

Joan Popiel goes so far as to have a pet weasel which likes to chase squirrels. She adds, "My pet weasel and my pet cat are not very good friends but they play together once in a while." Sherry Chubak saw her weasel after the first snowfall. The dogs saw it too. They barked and the weasel showed its teeth.

Anyone else seen any weasels recently?

SOME JUNIORS KEEP PIGEONS OTHERS HAVE PIGEONS VISIT THEM

Evelyn Lypchuk received a male and a female pigeon from her aunt but unfortunately the cat got them.

She plans on trying to keep pigeons again though.

Gordon Orenchuk has observed that a mother pigeon seems to know when the young are big enough to be pushed out of the nest. Why not tell us how the mother goes about doing this, Gordon, and how the young react? Observations like this are well worth keeping in your note book.

Audrey Lebedowich saw a pigeon fly into their chicken coop. "It would get along quite well with the chickens. It would sit on the roosts when it wanted to. After a week it flew away."

We're glad to hear that pigeons get along better with domestic fowl than they do with domestic cats.

THE RATTLESNAKE ON THE TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

by Colette Isinger, age 9, Yellow Creek

In the summer of 1967 my father, mother, brother and I went for a trip to Drumheller, Alberta.

Coming back home we drove on the Trans - Canada Highway. We were going quite fast when my father noticed a snake on the highway. My dad backed the car up to look at the snake. We found out it was a rattlesnake. We could hear it rattling a little bit. It was warming its body on the warm pavement. By and by some big trucks with double wheels ran over the snake. Then it was dead.

A RUFFED GROUSE

by Stella Holinaty, age 11, Yellow Creek

One day as our father was taking us to school we saw a Ruffed Grouse. The grouse was badly hurt. We picked him up and looked at him. He was grayish in color. He ruffed out his tufts on the side of his neck and then I knew it was a Ruffed Grouse. Dad said that we should take it to school but before we got to school it was dead.

JUNIORS EXPRESS THEMSELVES ABOUT THEIR SECTION

Two Juniors heard from, Wayne Renaud and Mary Gilles, both like the idea of contests. Wayne thinks nature stories would fit nicely into the Newsletter but he wants factual information as well and thinks that "at the age of 16 juniors should start contributing to the senior section. By that age they should be experienced enough to gain a say in the adult section. After all Ornithology is one profession where amateurs can contribute a lot."

Wayne and Mary would both like to see nature hobbies written up complete with illustrations.

As for Wayne he reads the entire *Blue Jay*. He finds it breaks the monotony of reading guide books.

Thanks for letting us hear from you. Any more suggestions?

Send comments about, suggestions for, and contributions to this section to: Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, 7200 6th Ave., Regina.

Letters and Notes

SOME GULL OBSERVATIONS

I have long admired the flight of gulls and riding a tractor affords many opportunities to observe them at close range. On breezy days they often come within 10 feet as they float, dip and wheel with scarcely a wing-beat. It seems to me that there has been a shift in population. Years ago, the Franklin's Gull was predominant with only the odd Ring-billed

Gull among them. Now I seldom see large groups of Franklin's, but the Ring-bill is in evidence almost every day all summer, singly or in groups of up to 50. They don't wander like Franklin's but may stay all day in one field following the tractor or just sitting on the ground.

It isn't unusual to see a gull, particularly Franklin's, with only one leg showing beneath the tail coverts. For