

THREE MAMMAL RECORDS FROM THE THELON GAME SANCTUARY, N.W.T.

by **Ernie Kuyt**, Fort Smith, N.W.T.

The interior mainland barrenland in the N.W.T., including the Thelon Game Sanctuary, is a relatively unexplored region. Most of the visits to the area have been made only by aircraft. Since 1950 only a few geological and biological survey teams have descended the river by canoe. Fairly recent accounts of flora and fauna found in the region are contained in Canadian Wildlife Service field reports by Kelsall (1952) and Tener (1952). Earlier information can be found in Clarke (1940), based on field work in 1936 and 1937. Generally speaking, the area bordering the Thelon River is well forested. White spruce (*Picea glauca*) is the predominant tree, with black spruce (*Picea mariana*) of lesser importance. Black poplar (*Populus balsamifera*) and tamarack (*Larix laricina*) are only encountered in discontinuous small clumps along the river. Willows (*Salix* spp.) are abundant along the entire length of the Thelon River as far as Beverly Lake. From the air, the immediate area along the Thelon appears to our eyes as a huge, green, strip-like "oasis" projecting into the barrens of east central Mackenzie District.

The purpose of this note is to record evidence of the occurrence north of their known range of two mammals previously unreported in the area concerned and to record the occurrence of one mammal from the Lookout Point, Thelon River area, where its presence is of interest although this mammal has been collected in coastal situations east (on Hudson's Bay) and north (on Coronation Gulf) of Lookout Point.

Porcupine (*Erethizon dorsatum*)—On July 22, 1962 I visited the old cabins in the "Warden's Grove" on the Thelon River, about seven miles below the junction of the Hanbury and Thelon Rivers. The cabin and warehouse were built some 35 years ago and have fallen into disrepair. In the corner of one of the buildings I noticed a considerable pile of droppings. The droppings were dark brown, somewhat elongated and immediately suggested those of Porcu-

pine. Several of the pellets, measuring about 20 mm., were collected and forwarded to the National Museum of Canada, where my tentative identification was confirmed. On July 28, 1963 while examining an abandoned wolf den on the north shore of the Thelon River about halfway between Hornby's bend and the Warden's Grove, I observed fresh Porcupine cuttings on nearby white spruce and willows.

I have not been able to find any reference to the occurrence of Porcupine in the area. It seems likely that the range extension of the Porcupine has been a recent one and that it has taken place following the Thelon drainage from more heavily forested areas to the south.

Moose (*Alces alces*)—Moose have been reported straying out on the barrens and Anderson (1924) and Clarke (1940) record several observations of them. Tyrrell (1902) describes the finding of two Moose antlers imbedded in the sand of the Thelon River bank, but postulates that the antlers might have been carried down by spring ice. Preble (1908) records D. R. Hanbury's statement that Moose were found in the Thelon River below its junction with the Hanbury River and that fresh tracks were numerous, especially in places where the animals had browsed on willows. If Moose are present there today at all, they are extremely rare; I have flown over the area on numerous occasions since 1960 and have not seen any moose. Muskox however are common on the willow covered banks of that section of the Thelon. Hornby (1934) reports no sign of Moose on the Thelon River.

On June 30 I discovered fairly recent evidence of Moose along the Finnie River about one mile south of Lookout Point. The Finnie River has sizable stands of white spruce near its confluence with the Thelon and scattered clumps of spruce as far as 50 miles to the south. Willow growth is abundant along the Finnie and its tributaries. I discovered two groups of droppings which were apparently those of Moose along a game trail parallel to the Finnie River. The

National Museum verified my identification. The two piles of droppings appeared to have been deposited in different years. In August 1963 I found another group of pellets in the same area. Earlier that year, Moose droppings were found at an old Eskimo "logging" site on the east bank of the Finnie about one mile away. Finally on 20 July 1964, an old group of Moose droppings was seen in the spruce grove near the cabin at Lookout Point. Also, again on the Finnie River's east bank I picked up several strands of long deer-like hairs from tall willows. The height of the willows precluded the hair being that of a caribou. The National Museum identified the hair as that of a Moose. Although we still have not seen Moose in the area, I am convinced that they are present, although rare, in the lower part of the Finnie River.

Masked Shrew (*Sorex cinereus ugyunak*)—The Lookout Point area falls well within the range of this shrew as indicated by Hall and Kelson (1959). It was first described by R. M. Anderson in 1945 (Anderson and Rand, 1945) on the basis of 13 specimens examined (type specimen collected in 1909 at Tuktoyaktok, N.W.T.). On August 10, 1964 my assistant Roy Murray caught two young shrews in snaptraps placed below white spruce in the grove near our cabin at Lookout Point. Two additional shrews were taken there on August 11 and August 14. The shrews were identified as *Sorex cinereus ugyunak* by the National Museum of Canada.

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THE CALL OF THE KIT FOX

by David Chandler, Masefield

I have discussed the question of the vanishing Kit Fox (or Swift Fox) with old-time ranchers from the area south of Shaunavon and they tell me that they have not seen one in 30 years. However, the question is often raised as to whether the Kit Fox is really extinct in Saskatchewan, and certain reports that have come to the *Blue Jay* suggest that this question still has to be answered (see, for example, the article in the *Blue Jay*, 14:63-65, June 1956, by R. D. Symons and the Editor's note that accompanied the article).

On the evening of May 20, 1964 I heard what I believe to be the call of the Kit Fox, coming from the direction of some old abandoned coal mines northeast of Shaunavon. I had not heard it in this area before, but at Masefield, back in the 1950's we used to hear this call almost frequently—always in the spring of the year and in the stillness of the evening. Each year the sound came from the same direction. In mentioning this to an uncle who was a former rancher in that country, I learned that it was from the exact location where the Kit Fox was consistently heard in the early days of his ranching.

Once familiar with the call (assuming that this is the call of the Kit Fox, as I believe), you could not mistake it. It is always difficult to capture the essence of sound by mere description, but heard in the distance this call can be described as soft and plaintive, somewhat suggestive of the Mourning Dove. It can be imitated by whistling through the nose and mouth at the same time, while shaping the tongue as though saying "KOoo KOOooo" (abruptly stop the first KOoo and let the last trail out).

Has anyone heard the call of the Kit Fox?