

Junior Naturalists

Edited by **Joyce Deutscher**, Regina

COMMENTS AND PRIZE WINNERS

The letter writing prize, a year's subscription to the *Blue Jay*, is awarded to a young contributor, Lynne Bordass, for an excellent description of a bittern's defence attitude (below). Congratulations, Lynne.

We are pleased to hear that Bohdan Pylypec is part of a scientific bird study expedition this summer in northern Saskatchewan. We understand he was asked to take part in this expedition because of the quality of his reporting which has appeared regularly in the *Junior Naturalists*. He tells about some of his impressions in a letter on page 143. Perhaps from now on Bohdan will be submitting articles to the adult section?! Good luck, Bohdan, as you move up!

Juniors may send letters and other contributions to Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, 1332 Edward St., Regina. The deadline for the next issue of the *Blue Jay* is October 15.

BITTERN OBSERVATION

by **Sylvia Lynne Bordass**, age 8, LeRoss

One day last summer we saw something funny across the road. The dog was barking and running around it, so we just went to see what it was. When we got closer we could see it was a bittern. It was all crouched down and its neck was all crimped down to its back. Its beak was stuck up in the air. It had its wings all spread out. Even when we went close and poked the hoe at it it would not fly. We gave it some grain and water, but it only pecked at our hands. After we moved away it started wandering all over the yard. Every time we came near, it would spread out its wings and flatten out on the ground. The last time we saw it, it had not yet flown away.

SHOVELER BEHAVIOUR

by **Brian Irving**, age 14, Kelvington

On the evening of May 4, 1964 I was walking in a pasture that had several shallow sloughs. I soon noticed two Shoveler drakes, one on the shore and the other farther out. Soon the latter started pumping its head up and down and as it came nearer the

shore the other started the same thing. This bird made croaking noises as it swam. As they came close together they started quarreling, ducking under water and slapping each other with their wings.

I was quite sure this was a mating performance but I was puzzled to find I could see no female. They now raced to the other end of the pond, quieted down and came back bobbing their heads and on the return a female flew up from the tall grass with the males in hot pursuit. The males took dashes at each other in the air until one proceeded with the female to another slough and the other came back to the same pond to rest.

A LETTER FROM REINDEER LAKE (JULY, 1965)

by **Bohdan Pylypec**, age 15, Yellow Creek

This summer I was an assistant with an ornithological field party consisting of Ross Lein and Richard Sanderson working in the Reindeer Lake region, under the direction of Dr. Robert Nero. I found the area very different from what I was used to.

The Reindeer Lake region is in the Pre-Cambrian Shield zone and therefore there is much exposed rock. Jack pines grow on this rock where there are small crevices with some soil. There are many lakes surrounding Reindeer Lake and many islands in these lakes. There are black spruce muskegs where black spruce grow on the moss found there. Jack pines thrive in the sandy areas.

The bird life is very much different here than in the south. Birds such as Myrtle Warblers, Slate-colored Juncos and Tennessee Warblers which are seen in the south only during migration can often be seen or heard, sometimes even with young. Mew Gulls, Herring Gulls, and Ring-billed Gulls fly over the water and look for fish. Common Terns and a few Arctic Terns do likewise. Common Mergansers can be seen fishing with Common Loons, the latter making their cry which is so characteristic of the north woods.

In quiet bays Red-winged Blackbirds, Rusty Blackbirds and Common Grackles can be seen. Sometimes a

Belted Kingfisher or an Osprey fly over the water looking for fish. Along some of the grassy lakeshores and in swamps Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Common Snipe and Swamp Sparrows can be seen. In the deep spruce or jack pine woods Swainson's and Hermit Thrushes are heard. Spruce Grouse, Gray Jays and Boreal Chickadees can be seen in the woods. Crows and Ravens can often be heard. Once in a while you can see a Bald Eagle, a Pigeon Hawk, or Sparrow Hawk flying in the air. In the evening Common Nighthawks fly over and once in a while the Long-eared Owl is seen.

The great north woods are indeed a beautiful and interesting region!

A RARE DISCOVERY

by Irene Pylypec, age 12, Yellow Creek

I live on a farm where there are many wild flowers, but never before have I been lucky enough to see a large lady's slipper on it.

I found about eight flowers of the yellow lady's slipper in our bush. Cows do not pasture there because it is too dense. The flowers were found in a shady place near a slough. The flower was yellow and very fragile.



Drawing by Irene Pylypec, Yellow Creek
Yellow Lady's Slipper

The sepals were a greenish-brown color and had curly tips. Its leaves were quite large and parallel veined. The lip of this flower had brownish spots which attract insects. The lady's slipper is a member of the orchid family and is quite rare.

Since I had never seen lady's slippers before, this was quite a thrill and I deeply hope that I can see these beautiful flowers again.

NEWS IN BRIEF FROM JUNIOR MEMBERS

Juniors have been busy as usual spotting rare birds and flowers, observing old familiar ones, camping in a bed of cacti and in general getting the feel of the great outdoors. Meanwhile *Marian Clark* sneaked up on a porcupine and photographed it with



Photo by Marian E. Clark, Flaxcombe
Porcupine in late March, 1965

her 127 Baby Brownie camera. We even have a request for a pen pal from *Betty Ternier*, age 13, Cochin. Her hobbies are reading, photography, and nature—especially birds.

Several letters were received from the grade 5 class at Yellow Creek. These children are fortunate in having a teacher who is interested in natural history. *Marie Sheremata*, age 10, tells about watching a robin's nest. She waited until the young were safely out of the nest and then took it home. Meanwhile *Oli Oleksyn*, also 10 years old, had an encounter with a muskrat and ran a race with it to its hole. He and his friend Gary followed the muskrat's tunnel under the ice.

Gerald Wilke, age 13, of Montmartre was fortunate enough to go on a

camping trip to Beechy last summer. He tells us, "We slept in tents. It was not too warm. The cacti were very hard to sleep on but are very nice when in bloom. He appreciated very much that Professor Ledingham took him along on the trip.

Alfred Jones of Beechy has a different story to tell. While riding the river hills he came upon a lynx eating a dead deer.

Juniors always seem to appreciate help from older naturalists. *David Riome* of Nipawin thanks Maurice Street for helping him with his bird observations. He reports having seen a Northern Shrike and adds, "We also have an immature Harris' Sparrow coming to our feeder every day. We were surprised to know that there hadn't been one wintering around Nipawin since 1938."

Donald Wajichowsky, age 11, Yellow Creek, reports having seen Black Tern nests. "Last summer Oli and I went to Yellow Creek slough. As we were walking, a Black Tern flew off the nest. Then it made a loud cry and all the other terns flew off their nests. They started to swoop at us. They came so low that Oli hit one with his jacket.

"At first we found one nest. After a while we found fourteen nests in all. Their nests were very close together. They like to build their nests on very small patches of ground. Their nests are made out of cattails and other marsh plants."

Linda Nemeth, age 9, kept watch over a Barn Swallow nest until one day she found it on the ground with only two young swallows left. She took them home and fed them until they were able to look after themselves.

Some House Wrens observed by her sister *Elsie*, age 10, suffered a similar fate. One day *Elsie* found only two of four birds left in the nest. "I was very disappointed. I don't know what happened to the other two. They were not old enough to fly. They probably fell out. In about two or three days there was not a bird left in the nest."

A bit of mystery surrounds a hornet's nest according to *Richard Hogg*, age 11, Carnduff. *Richard* tells us, "One day last fall we saw a hornet's nest. It was about 10 inches in diam-

eter and was in a caragana tree on the bank of our creek. Being very careful not to go too close we kept watching it every day. One morning we were very surprised to find it partly torn down. There were just a few pieces on the ground.

"We think it must have been a skunk or a 'coon that did the damage."

Keven Van Tighem, age 12, Calgary, noted some interesting bird behavior one day. He reports, "Last year on May 5, some robins, House Sparrows and White-crowned Sparrows were eating bread crumbs which I set out for them. As I sat at the window watching them they stopped eating and seemed to turn into statues. I looked up and suddenly I saw a big gray goshawk. It flew by and soon the robins and sparrows resumed eating.

"I occasionally saw the goshawk after that, usually around 6 o'clock in the evening, but after June did not see it again."

Brian Irving's spring experiences included bird watching. *Brian* is 14 and lives at Kelvington. "On the evening of May 11, 1964", he writes, "I took my binoculars and note book and went to a marshy area surrounded by summerfallow. The first bird I saw of interest was a Magnolia Warbler in an aspen. It kept flying out a few feet, doing acrobatics in the air and singing a melody of songs at the same time. I decided he must have been letting off a little steam over the thrill of spring."

Juniors are always thrilled when they spot something rare and unusual. *Dan Ferguson*, age 7, of Ft. Vermilion, Alberta, reports just such an experience. He saw some Whooping Cranes as they settled in a field near some water just before sunset. *Dan* continues, "We saw them in the middle of their dance. They were near a slough. We read about Whooping Cranes."

Oli Oleksyn sends us several more reports, one of seeing thirty-two ground squirrels running around on some cut-down bush. He was also thrilled at the sight of a hummingbird and tells us, "One day I was walking on our sidewalk and I heard a humming sound. At first I couldn't see it. Then out of a flower came something. It was a Ruby-throated Hummingbird."