

CAMPUS WILDLIFE

by J. W. T. Spinks, President, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

This description of wildlife on campus at the President's Residence in Saskatoon will introduce many of our readers for the first time to the Saskatchewan Natural History Society's honorary president, Dr. J. W. T. Spinks. In the years that he has served as honorary president, Dr. Spinks' warm interest in our projects has been much appreciated. Here he takes time from the busy round of activities as President of the rapidly expanding University of Saskatchewan to share his personal appreciation of wildlife with other readers of the Blue Jay.

One of the more pleasant aspects of the life of the President of the University of Saskatchewan is that he lives in a very nice house situated at the top of a high bank overlooking the South Saskatchewan River, near the 5th Street bridge in Saskatoon. There is a rather large garden with many trees, including a very fine avenue of blue spruce leading down to the house. The garden is surrounded by a wire fence which serves to keep out at least some of the dogs and cats which might otherwise stray in, and this encourages wild animals to come up from the river bank to the garden. So we see rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, gophers, striped gophers, the occasional porcupine and weasel, and one evening recently, a family of four skunks playing together on a ledge of rock at the edge of the rock garden, just like kittens! We gave them a wide berth!

The animals are not an unmixed blessing. We don't mind the squirrels tripping the trees of cones, but we are not so happy when we find that the porcupine has chewed the bark off a number of tree branches and that the rabbit has developed an undesirable taste for young rose bushes which get eaten right down to ground level. And in the spring tulips seem to take their fancy too. One rabbit took a particular fancy to the pansies and would eat them in a very entertaining fashion nipping off a stem well down from the flower, chewing meditatively at the stem until only the flower remained just in front of the rabbit's lips, and then, plop, the flower would disappear, just like a child sucking in bubble gum! Not so amusing when

the rabbit does this at the rate of three per minute!

During the winter the various animal tracks in the fresh snow in the garden and in the driveway gave continuous pleasure, giving evidence that the animals were around even when one didn't see them.

The birds are a continuous and changing source of pleasure — robins, thrushes, woodpeckers, crows, canaries, orioles, starlings, catbirds, grosbeaks, mourning doves, etc., and even the occasional humming bird. The binoculars and bird books are always at hand even though we are not experts. Some winters we have had pheasants and partridges in the garden, and we have done our best to feed them. One winter a pheasant kept company with four partridges which would often spend the night on our lawn, almost buried in the snow. The pheasant would wait until one of the partridges had scraped a hole in the snow and then he would move in and settle down in the hole himself, head projecting in one direction, long tail lying on the snow in the other, apparently quite comfortable even at 40 below.

All in all, these casual but almost daily observations of wild life add greatly to the pleasure of living on campus.

