

Junior Naturalists

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

THE RESOURCE READER

How many Juniors, teachers and parents too, are aware that the Information Branch, Department of Natural Resources, Administration Building, Regina, has material available in loose leaf form on the natural history of Saskatchewan? It is well worth writing to the Information Branch for information on how to receive the binder, the loose leaf material available and the cost of the service.

Stella Holinaty from Yellow Creek, tells us in her letter that she used the Resource Reader to identify the squirrel her father caught. We note that Juniors writing in this issue use every resource available from Dr. Houston's bird banding visit to radio broadcasts and resource readers.

TREE SWALLOWS BUILD AGAIN

by **Kenneth Mazur**, age 11, Yellow Creek

This spring I built a bird house. In a few days a pair of Tree Swallows came to it. They hauled dried grass and feathers into the bird house. The female laid six eggs. Then a sparrow came and broke the eggs. A few days later the swallows started to build again. Now they have five eggs in the nest.

LONG-EARED OWL

by **Joan Popiel**, age 11, Yellow Creek

One day Mr. Isinger told his pupils that Dr. Houston was coming to band owls. I went looking for owl nests and found a Long-eared Owl nest with six eggs in it. Every two to four days I went to visit the nest. There are now five young owls.

Dr. Houston will band the owls to see if they follow their migration routes, to see if they come back to their nesting places next year, and to see how long they live.

DR. HOUSTON BANDS OWLS

by **Colleen Shewchuk**, age 12, Yellow Creek

On May 25 some of my classmates and I went to watch Dr. Houston band Horned Owls.

In the first nest Dr. Houston banded three Horned Owls. An infertile egg fell out of the nest. Dr. Houston wrapped the egg in foil and took it with him. He saves the eggs to find out how much weed and insect spray is in the egg.

In the second nest we found one Horned Owl and another infertile egg.

In the first nest there was a rabbit and in the second a pocket gopher.

FAMILY SCATTERED BY A CROW

by **Sherry Chubak**, age 11, Yellow Creek

One day my brother found a duck nest. As he walked towards it the mother duck started leading her ducklings away. Then a crow came swooping down and picked up a little duckling. When the mother saw that she started going every which way and the ducklings scattered. She started walking faster and only one duckling caught up with her and the rest were lost. So my brother took the four lost ducklings to our mother hen and she is now taking care of them.

OUR AQUARIUM

by **Audrey Lebedowich**, age 12, Tway

One day our class decided to make an aquarium so one of my classmates brought a glass container. Other of my classmates went out during science period and got some plants and animals. Next day someone else brought some frog's eggs and a frog. Mr. Hozun gave our teacher some minnows to put in the aquarium. The frog often croaked during school hours.

Later we poured the contents of the aquarium back into the slough.

CLIFF SWALLOWS BUILD A NEST

by **Colette Isinger**, age 8, Yellow Creek

We live near a hall and the Cliff Swallows like to build their nest on it. On Sunday night it rained and in the morning there was much mud. The Cliff Swallows would take some mud and then mix it with saliva from their mouth and stick it on their nest. The House Sparrow tried to move in after the Cliff Swallows had finished the nest.

JACK RABBITS

by **Eugenia Kprval**, age 12, Yellow Creek

One day my dad saw two jack rabbits running from an old threshing machine. Our two dogs tried to catch them. Dad saw them many times after that. He said they must have a nest in the machine.

About a month later when I was out walking I stepped about two inches from some shrubs. All of a sudden a rabbit came out from the shrubs. It ran ten feet away from me. We stood and looked at each other for about two minutes. Then our dog came. The rabbit ran toward the machine. I see the rabbits about every two weeks now.

PET MAGPIE

by **Glen Flemming**, age 13, Yellow Creek

On June 24 while working in the field I heard cries of young magpies in the bush. I climbed about nine feet up the tree. I caught a young magpie which I took home.

The young magpie likes to eat bread mixed with milk. In about two days I was able to let it out of its cage. The magpie is so tame now that I can walk right up to it. Now it is eating raw meat.

A CAPTURED RABBIT

by **Gary Oleksyn**, age 11, Yellow Creek

One day I saw a Bush Rabbit sitting very still. So I slowly walked closer to it and all of a sudden I grabbed it.

I lifted it up and with its hind legs it scratched me on the arm. Then it started to make a funny noise.

I took it home and showed my parents. My dad said it was a Bush Rabbit. I kept it for a couple of minutes and then I let it go.

I went back to the place where I caught the rabbit and found some bark chewed off the tree by it.

SPIDER AND INSECT COLLECTING

by **Donna Matkowsky**, age 10, Yellow Creek

One day I started collecting insects and spiders. My mother found a spider in her hair. Then I found an ant on the doorstep. My sister found another spider. She found the spider on the curtains. On the screen door I caught two flies. One was small and one was large.

At school we use a killing jar to give insects a swift death.

BIRDS AT BUFFALO POUND LAKE

by **Carol Andrews**, age 13, Moose Jaw

Have you been to Buffalo Pound Provincial Park lately? Since the arrival of the warm weather, it has become the nesting place for many birds that one rarely sees. On Victoria Day weekend we were surprised to see what looked like a large grey cat perched in a big nest in a tree in the camping area. On closer observation we found it to be a Great Horned Owl guarding her two young owlets which looked like a pair of fluffy, white ookpiks.

Later a loud chattering call announced the arrival of a flicker who perched on a near-by branch and began unconcernedly to preen himself. His plumage was as smooth as if he wore a silk stocking over his head and neck. When he flew away we saw the flash of yellow under his tail.

A robin has built her nest in a very unsuitable spot. It is on an exposed ledge in front of the men's toilet where she is constantly interrupted in her task of brooding her four eggs. We wonder if she will be able to raise her family in such a public place!

Each year a different species of bird seems to be predominate at the park. This year there are many noisy king-birds raising families. Last year there seemed to be a large number of Baltimore Orioles and Yellow Warblers. Two years ago there was a large flock of pelicans. This year none—but last week we again saw four of these large lovely birds flying over the lake.

I have heard that several guided nature walks are being planned for the enjoyment of summer visitors. If you have a free weekend coming up, may I suggest that you bring a pencil, notebook, picnic lunch, some field glasses and perhaps a camera and spend an enjoyable afternoon at this lovely spot. I can guarantee that your first visit will not be your last.

OUR FRIEND MR. CHIPMUNK

by Mary Gillies, age 11, Unity

Last summer we went to Jackfish Lake for our vacation. I am in the habit of rising early so I usually swim before breakfast.

It was then that I saw the chipmunk. It was a rather cool morning and the dew was sparkling in the sun when a little chipmunk came up to me. He picked up a crumb and put it in his tiny mouth. I was thrilled.

Later my sisters and I made little trails of bread leading to our hands. Our little friend actually ate out of our hands.

A THIN THING

by Nancy Reid, age 10, Camp Robinson,
Ontario

The other day we saw a thin thing. We caught it and put it in a pitcher. It was twelve or more inches long. It was about the size of a number ten thread and was black.

Later the same day I caught another one. It was smaller than the first one about eight or more inches long. I put this one in a pail. It swam all around. When they swim you can't tell their head from their tail. But when you pick them up you can tell that their

tail is forked and that their head is darker than their body. We threw them away after that because mother couldn't stand them.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The "thing" described by Nancy is a worm. As its shape suggests it is sometime called a hair worm or a thread worm. Nancy's description of the worm was accompanied by an equally good drawing of it.]

BIRD AND MAMMAL OBSERVATIONS BY JUNIORS

Nest watching was a favorite occupation of some Juniors this spring. Evelyn Lypchuk describes a woodpecker's nest she saw, "The nest was in a fence post. There were about five holes in the post. The nest looked deserted."

The flicker's nest discovered by Bobby Oleksyn was far from deserted. He quickly pulled his hand out of the nest when he felt a bird.

A little more cautious was a Junior (this letter wasn't signed) and her cousin Ellen who spotted a nest. "A big bird flew from the nest when we got there. We both got scared. I was going to climb the tree to see what would be in the nest but the mother and father were flying around the tree." Since the nest was probably a hawk's nest it is just as well that the two cousins did not climb up to it.

Don Wojcickowski mentioned an unusual bluebird nest, one with six eggs instead of the usual four, while John Mukli counted a total of eleven eggs in a duck's nest.

Delmer Dutka didn't have to go looking for a nest to investigate. He built one for bluebirds. Delmer put a hinged lid on the nest and kept notes. He reports having set up the nest on May 9, the nest was completed by the 16, the first egg in it by May 20, six eggs by June 3, and to quote Delmer:

"June 7, six young, bare, eyes closed.

"June 12, six young, feathers coming, eyes shut.

"I got the idea," Delmer adds, "from my teacher and a radio program, *Neighbours of Wood and Plain.*"

Apparently some birds feel that an ordinary bird house is not big enough for them. According to Ellen Kuz, "Almost every year a family of swallows moves into our old house. Whenever we try to get into the old house, the swallows try to make us go away."

Ken Orenchuk was watching nests too and noted that it took a pair of Barn Swallows two days to make their nest.

Ten eggs were found in a Ruffed Grouse nest by Elsie Nemeth while out walking with her father and brother. "When we came close to the nest," she reports, "the grouse stood up by her nest so we would not harm her eggs. When we went away she went back to her nest."

Iris Simon was careful not to disturb a mother robin on her nest. "When I found a robin's nest", she relates, "I looked to see if any birds were watching me. No birds were watching me so I peeped in. There were two eggs in the nest."

Not quite such a happy event was witnessed by Idelle Swickiniuk. She tells us. "My brother and I went for a hike. I stopped for a rest near a tree. All of a sudden a baby robin fell out of its nest. It must have fallen over the edge. The fall killed the bird." Meanwhile Elizabeth Toth found a dead oriole, still warm.

From all accounts these Juniors from Yellow Creek have been busy observing life and death in the animal world around them. Nor were birds the only animals observed. Mammals came in for a few comments as well.

Rosemary Nemeth found gopher and squirrel tracks in the mud as well as a deserted badger den. A squirrel nibbling a nut held in his front paws was observed by Debra Gingara who adds, "As I kept watching the squirrel I was surprised to see it jump such a distance from tree to tree. The squirrel had a big bushy tail and was reddish in color. I soon found out that it was a red squirrel."

On her way to Porcupine Plain, Deborah Shewchuk saw three black bears." The mother bear was on one side of the road and the two cubs on the other side. The cubs ran to the mother. Then the family trotted into the bush."

Audrey Zip chanced upon a muskrat sitting on a log. "It appeared to be eating some grass. As I came closer to it, the muskrat jumped into the water and swam away."

Evelyn Lypchuk, while out on a hike, came across a squirrel's nest. "It was about seven feet off the ground. The nest was full of feathers. I didn't stay at the nest too long."

That just about winds up the news for this time. The story about the aquarium by Audrey Lebedowich however reminds me of something which happened to me while teaching school in the country. The students brought in a collection of water animals and plants from a nearby creek for observation in the classroom. However, we failed to recognize the little wrigglers in the aquarium until several days afterwards when the peace and quiet of the classroom was interrupted by frequent slaps as we swatted mosquitos. It seems we were raising them in the aquarium!

Goodbye for now and let us hear from all of you again.

BIRD BOOK

Some time ago Mr. R. C. Burron sent us an excellent hand-made book, *Arctic Birds of Cambridge Bay, Northwest Territories*, prepared by the students in his class in the federal day school.

CONTRIBUTIONS ARE WELCOME FROM ALL JUNIORS

Letters, drawings and photographs for the Junior Section should be sent to Mrs. Joyce Deutscher, Junior Editor, 7200 6th Ave., Regina, to arrive not later than October 15 for inclusion in the next issue of the *Blue Jay*.