

showed all the contentment of a carefully guarded brood of young under a mother's watchful eye. Tiring quickly, as all young life will, they would scramble into my lap peeping loudly if they were unable to make it until I helped them up. Here they preened themselves before gathering together under my hands to sleep momentarily. Now and then a small black eye would open, and looking me in the face a drowsy little duck would peep some duck language which I was quite sure I understood. Waking from scramble up to my face. Apparently their short nap they would try to the source of my voice was to them the key point of their affection, since as soon as they struggled to my shoulders (a task requiring some help) they snuggled under my chin and as close around my neck as possible, peeping loudly in answer to the small talk I used whenever I was with them.

Monday morning and school came much too soon for me. I had to see that everything was in order for the five little ducks before leaving home. I hurried out to see how they had survived the night, spent like the night before under an arrangement of old grain sacks simulating as much as possible the comfort of a mother duck. As I came to the door I heard saw them standing together in the peeping sounds of distress. Looking in saw them standing together in the

middle of the floor very lost and frightened. They were now expecting me to stay with them constantly.

I spoke to them as they quickly gathered about my hands while I knelt to pick them up; they were all now contentedly quiet as they busily checked me from head to foot. Satisfied that I was the lost parent, they hurried up their ramp to play and feed in the tub of water. When they had grown bigger I planned to let them join the barnyard chickens for company. I could see this would soon have to be done if I were to have any freedom. Making them as comfortable as possible and leaving instructions with my mother who had been paying more than a little attention and was willing to help care for them, I left for school.

I would like to say that all the wonderful plans I had for these ducklings, who in such a short time had become so dependent and loyal to me, did come true. But I was expecting too much for them to look after themselves at night and during the day while I was at school. I had also overlooked the fact that the grain bin was far from weather-proof, and one night, a few days later a rain storm came up and the leaky roof allowed the cold moisture in to chill them. They did not survive the night and the next morning I buried their five little bodies near the nest I had taken them from.

## Letters and Notes

### BALD EAGLES AT LA RONGE

On April 18, 1967, Peter Gregg and I went out from La Ronge to the north end of Dominion Island to check a fish net. There were several birds at the pull hole, and as we approached to about 200 yards one of the birds flew up and we saw that it was a Bald Eagle. Much to our surprise the other two birds were also Bald Eagles and not ravens.

On April 20 we saw a Bald Eagle on two occasions. The second sighting,

about an hour after the first, was only about a quarter of a mile from La Ronge when seen. This eagle was being harassed by a couple of ravens.

The interesting thing is that these Bald Eagle sightings are so very close to town. I've been living in La Ronge since May 1965 and had not noticed any until now.

D. Wayne Davis (*Blue Jay*, 24:160-167, 1966) lists seven Bald Eagles reported by C. L. Ferguson as found dead at poisoned bait set intended for wolves. I know of one more which he

overlooked. In late April or early May, 1959. I had the opportunity to go out with Mr. Ferguson in the Uranium City area while I was Department of Mineral Resources Mining Recorder at Uranium City. About ten miles north of Uranium City, there was a bait set at which we landed. The policy was to make the set frozen into ice, check the kill in spring before lakes were open but after the snow was off, and then let the bait sink into the lake. This set was beside an island in the north end of Leblanc Lake near where there was a permanent eagle nest. Anyway, among other things, this set produced an immature Bald Eagle. I remember it clearly, for it was the first time I had seen an eagle so close.

This year I understand that there are about 200 bait sets for wolves in the north. I do not know the merits or hazards of this program but at least the baits are picked up and destroyed in the spring and are not left to sink into the lakes when the ice finally melts.

Since there will be six or seven Mineral Resources geological field parties working this summer in the Precambrian parts of Saskatchewan I suggest that they be asked to watch for and report active nests of the Bald Eagle in Saskatchewan.—A. W. Scarfe, La Ronge.

### INDIGO BUNTING AT AYLSHAM

On June 1, 1967, while I was rounding the corner of the house to take lunch to my husband a small shiny bird flew lazily up to a branch just above eye level in bright sunlight not 20 feet in front of me. As it sat erect, facing me, I tried to note distinguishing characteristics. The blue was a brilliant green blue that paled (not grayed) from throat to belly. The head was round. The beak was light in color and of medium length and width. It perched there so quietly that I thought I could move back and go for my binoculars but it flew to another branch. Then it flew up and away. I could see its back and wings and tail and they seemed quite dark.

Lunch was delayed while I checked in *Birds of America* and then in *The Birds of the Saskatchewan River*. I was surprised to find that Houston and Street record only one sighting of the Indigo Bunting, seen by Maurice Street near Armely, June 23, 1927. I am sure that my bird was an Indigo Bunting and the farm will never be the same again since I saw that flash of incredible blue.

Since then I have seen two pair of Mountain Bluebirds and I'm more sure than ever that I saw an Indigo Bunting on June 1. Its color was so different and its shape was sleek and slender, not fluffy like the bluebird.—Mrs. M. Robin, Aylsham.

### QUERY RE: WHIP-POOR-WILL

On May 28, 1967 we visited a campsite just inside Alberta on the main highway from Dawson Creek, B.C., to Edmonton. At approximately three o'clock in the afternoon, Mrs. J. A. Paul and I were walking near a small slough which extended through a boggy place to a muskeg a few hundred yards west. Both of us distinctly heard the call of a Whip-poor-will, repeated three times, once quite close, and twice further away to the west. I heard the bird fly as if startled, but neither of us could see it. The sound seemed to originate in the mixed poplar and spruce on the edge of the swampy slough, about the level of our heads and within 25 or 50 feet of us.

Mrs. Paul knows the call of the Whip-poor-will well, as she has spent many years in Eastern Canada. I have heard the call in Wisconsin, and I had also refreshed my memory by listening to a recording of it.

Mrs. Paul and I have spent more than 30 years in this area, and have never heard this call here before.—Mrs. Dortha Calverley, Dawson Creek, B.C.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: In answer to Mrs. Calverley's query as to whether the Whip-poor-will could be expected in that location, we have referred her to

the range map given by Godfrey in his new *Birds of Canada* (1966) in which the breeding range of the species is shown to extend no farther west than central Saskatchewan. No casual records west of this range are cited by Godfrey, which means that a record from Dawson Creek would be most unusual.]

## WOOD BISON OR PLAINS BISON?



*Blue Jay* readers may be interested in this snapshot of my son with two skulls of what we believe to be bison or prairie buffalo. The much-weathered bones were found on summerfallow about seven miles south of Porcupine Plain (SW 10-41-9 w2) last summer. The horns measure 28" from tip to tip.

Thirty years ago this country was heavy bush, but it has been cleared and farmed for many years. The bones were brought up by a deep tillage cultivator. We did not know that the prairie buffalo would be found so far north.—*Mrs. G. Knudsen*, Porcupine Plain, Manitoba.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of the location of Porcupine Plain on what used to be the edge of the boreal forest these skulls could represent a slight intrusion of the plains bison into the forest, or possibly a southerly record for the wood bison subspecies. The skulls look big and broad and could be wood buffalo. When such skulls are found, it is worthwhile to save them for the museum for purposes of helping to determine the range of these two recent forms of the buffalo. There should, of course, be some intermediate animals, and those on the fringe may be.]

## SASK. ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY MEETING

The annual meeting of the Archaeological Society, held at the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History and at Last Mountain House, April 21-23, 1967 was a great success. The private displays of members were all very interesting. I was especially interested in the illustrated lecture on pictographs presented by Tim Jones. Special speakers such as Professor Z. Pohorecky and Dr. R. Forbes left us with lots of thoughts to ponder. The society could benefit by an increase in membership. More amateur members would be welcome.—*A. J. Hruska*, Gerald.



Photo by A. J. Hruska  
Display of mauls by D. Braddell,  
Reston, Man.

## COUGAR

Thomas White's article on the cougar in Saskatchewan (*Blue Jay*, 25:84-89, 1967) prompts me to write of my experience with a cougar.

My cousin "B" and I encountered one when he was 11 and I 14. We were on a fishing trip on the Kokisulah River about seven miles southwest of Shawnigan Lake on Vancouver Island.

After camping overnight at Grant Lake we returned in the morning to our favourite river where we always got plenty of trout. With us we had a white and tan bull terrier called "Casey" who was afraid of nothing and loved a good fight.

We were having lunch on the stony creek bed with a small fire when we noticed "Casey" barking up a large cedar tree some 200 yards down stream. I commented that he must have something more than a squirrel treed as he wouldn't waste much time on such small stuff. We finished eating and approached the tree which was big and had large drooping branches sweeping close to the ground. I was in the lead and when close heard a low whine. I wish I could say as the novelists do that my hackles rose but I knew not then, nor do I know now whether I have any. However, I felt as if a piece of ice had been dropped down the back of my shirt collar.

We laid down our rods and cautiously approached. "Casey" was very excited and obviously pleased to have allies. I peered under the branches and there about twelve feet from the ground sprawled over several limbs was a large mountain lion grinning at me. With knees knocking I motioned "B" to come see. He did and I think his jaw dropped. We had reason to be afraid since we had no gun, only hunting knives and a belt hatchet; however, the lion appeared more amused than annoyed and just lay there with his or her mouth open. We backed off and tried to call "Casey" away but he would not leave. "B" went to the river and caught a couple more trout and returned and approached the tree

again saying he wanted to see if he could make the cougar blink. He claimed he did. I still blink when I think of how foolhardy we were.—*H. F. Eberts*, 204 Angus Crescent, Regina.

## A MUSKRAT ON OUR LAWN

Saskatchewan had a very heavy snowfall during the winter of 1966-67. In Churchbridge driveways were piled high on either side and ditches were full. As the snow melted, I discovered a grass-lined tunnel leading from the culvert under our driveway approach to our front steps, some 30 feet. The tunnel was three to four inches in diameter. Although the garbage along our street was picked up in front of the houses, I couldn't believe that a barn rat was living there for I hadn't noticed any tracks in the snow during the winter.

By the time most of the snow had melted in April, I became even more puzzled. Tunnels, side by side and grass-floored, covered a swath three to ten feet in width from the culvert to the north side of our front steps which face east. Here, some two feet from the house, was a dense well-made nest of grass the size of one's head. Underneath the nest was an excavation similar to one a jackrabbit makes for temporary hiding in a field. For a week I watched closely. Considerable sprinklings of dung of a rat-sized animal were mixed with the grass along the tunnels.

One warm evening, after most of the snow had gone and the ditches were full of water, I suddenly spied the enterprising animal—a fair-sized muskrat. He was sitting motionless at the water's edge along the front of our neighbor's lawn. We gave chase until he crawled out of the water again and began to "wash" himself. We crowded around and he paid little attention to us. He was apparently healthy. We did not see him again.

This animal had apparently forsaken a shallow, solid-frozen slough during the winter for the comforts of

he city. He liked my Parkland Kentucky lawn grass. In fact, we raked up two and a half well packed garbage cans of dry grass left from his tunnels, nest and other foraging. It would appear to me that muskrats in bygone days may have frequently overwintered without water by making a home in some well-grassed site.—*Sam Beaton, Churchbridge.*

### SPRING IN ENGLAND

We are just back (May 14, 1967) from two beautiful months in southern England. Spring there was as early as it is late here, and we had only one wet week and a couple of other dismal days. At Kew on Good Friday, there were camellias, azaleas and rhododendrons in bloom, though the full tide of blossom was two weeks later we were told. I regretted that we did not get back again. The pocket handkerchief front gardens, and those marvellous parks really make London beautiful.

Kenwood (a Guinness gift of a stately home on Hampstead, with sweeping

lawn down to a little lake and wild woods beyond, with shrubberies and flowerbeds around the lawns . . . . and old Gainsborough, Romney, Reynolds and other Master Painters' works hanging in rooms they were suited to) was a sort of bonus on one of our last days there. I enjoyed it better than the Tate, a good deal.

We had blackbirds near our daughter's house, close to the Colindale section of the Edgware road, and I was surprised how its many notes and timbre resembled our robin's. But birds didn't come my way much, and when they did nobody seemed knowledgeable about birdsong or call notes. Skylarks sang for us at Stonehenge.

We enjoyed our travels, especially the gardens and it was tantalizing to have to leave England just as roses were making buds, but it is nice to be back home to see spring arrive here. Robins, Harris' Sparrows with their sweet plaintive notes, and White-throated Sparrows have been through by the score. We have a lovely little nook for birdwatching.—*Marion Nixon, Redvers.*



From kodachrome by Sheila Keay

Members of Saskatchewan Natural History Society on prairie of East Block, Cypress Hills, June 10, 1967.