

Junior Naturalists

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

NATURE HOBBIES

by **Helene R. White**, Red Deer, Alberta

Once March arrives we all grow impatient for the first sign of spring. To many this means the opening of the flower buds on the willows.

This year let's rush spring a little bit and force a few pussy willows indoors. On a warm day, the temperature must be above 32 degrees for a few hours to allow the sap to run. Cut, don't break, a few small branches from each of several shrubs. To take an armful from one plant is sheer laziness and mutilates the tree. Remember, without our conservation

of the beauty of our countryside would soon be a bleak and uninviting place.

Once your willows are cut and indoors, mash the stem ends to make it easy for the cutting to take up the water you now place it in. Move the vase of willows down to the cool of your basement for about a week, then bring them up to the light. (Nanking cherry branches may be forced in the same way, incidentally.) Before you know it you will have your silver pussy willows.

Should you wish them to remain in the open bud stage, take them out of the water and let them dry. We leave ours in water until the catkins form. These little tails are the actual flowers of the willow.

Did you know that this deciduous plant is unisexual, meaning that there are male plants and female plants. Only in the magic season of spring is this secret apparent. The male, as in so many of nature's species, is by far the more noticeable of the two. He produces a showy amount of silver grey catkins and grows bright yellow anthers on the slender delicate stamens of his flowers. The hungry bees head straight for this first major pollen and nectar producer of spring.



The female is a mousy little catkin with inconspicuous green cleft pistils. When you wander into a willowicket and a fragrant scent surrounds you, look for her. This is her way of attracting the bees so necessary for pollination.

Whether you force some willows to the catkin stage in the house or prefer to study them in the field, do not miss the opportunity of studying these interesting blossoms under a magnifying glass.

If your studies are done in the field you will likely spy a misty brown butterfly fluttering from catkin to catkin. If its beautiful wings are mottled in yellow and orange with a dash of scarlet, chances are this little visitor is the *Vanessa milberti*, a butterfly of the tortoiseshell family. It frequents the willows and poplars in early spring. Insecticides have taken their toll of these butterflies, so don't try to collect a specimen. Enjoy its fleeting beauty and allow it to go on its way.

A note pad and pencil should accompany you on each outing. Notes and rough sketches can be made for later checking and positive identification of your finds. Date each sketch and note made for later reference. As far from now you might want to know just when those catkins and butterflies were observed, and where, so you can plan another field trip.

Editors Note: *The Blue Jay* apologizes for the incorrect spelling in Helene White's last article of the Maskasoo Creek.]

BARN SWALLOWS ARE PERSEVERING

by Darwin Mazur, age 14, Yellow Creek

Last summer a pair of Barn Swallows decided to make a nest in our chicken coop. The female laid seven eggs. She incubated for five weeks. I washed the eggs to discover that they were all rotten. A few days later she started to lay some more eggs. This time she only laid five eggs. She incubated for two weeks. At the end of two weeks the eggs hatched. There

were five featherless young swallows. The young were in the nest for two weeks. After this they flew away.

I hope the parents will have better luck next year.

THE HURT MALLARD DUCK

by Evelyn Lypchuk, age 12, Yellow Creek

One day while I was milking cows I saw a Mallard duck hit a telephone wire. I quickly ran out to see the duck. The duck was hurt. I took the duck into the barn. I went to the house to get some bread and water to give to the duck. When I gave the duck the food she wouldn't eat it so I thought she would eat if I left. In the morning all the food was gone and she was ready to fly. I painted one of her feathers yellow and sent her off. Now I see she has made a nest. I see her almost every day.

NEST AND EGGS AT LAKE ISLE

by David Hobson, Edmonton, Alberta

On June 7, my friends and I went on a camping trip to Lake Isle, which is 50 miles west of Edmonton. We camped on Birch Island which was two miles from shore. Here I found quite a few nests. There were ten nests and seven eggs belonging to the Red-winged Blackbird. In one nest I found a cowbird's egg. There were three nests and five eggs of a Mallard. I also saw a Mallard and her young and two Red-necked Grebes.

The next day I came upon a woodchuck in the entrance of her burrow.

On the day we left I got a Red-winged Blackbird's nest which was an empty one for my collection.

MYSTERY BIRD

by Ian Kinnan, age 10, Melfort

Our family is trying to observe nature. Mom is very interested in flowers, and I have seen over 115 different birds this year. But we are really puzzled about a robin-sized bird with a long black tail and a white patch under the tail. It is gray with a white patch on the wing, a long slender bill with a white chin.

When it flies we see a white strip on either side of the tail.

We think this is a mockingbird but it is not found in our area. Its wing pattern is exactly the same as in the book. He sits on our fence and on the cut-leaved elder and eats the berries and appears to have a forked tail. I have seen him on September 19, and every day from October 7 to October 13. While I was writing I saw two. They looked young with ruffed out feathers. [Editor's Note: This is surely an authentic observation of a Mockingbird. They are rare in Saskatchewan, but they do appear from time to time in various localities.]

THE LITTLE LOST GOSLING

by **Rosemary Nemeth**, age 13, Yellow Creek

One evening when my mother was going to town she saw a little Canada Goose gosling. She caught it and brought it home. We thought it was about two weeks old. We didn't have any other tame ducks and geese. We could see the gosling was very lonely so my mother went and got some small tame geese and ducks. When the little gosling saw the small geese and ducks we could see she was very happy.

Later in the season she didn't look as nice because she was changing in colour. We didn't clip her wings and it was fun watching her fly.

This fall she looks like a graceful bird. But unfortunately we are going to butcher all the tame geese and ducks and the goose that was the little lost gosling.

THE BEAUTIFUL SQUIRREL

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

One day my dad and I went to pick hazelnuts. I was picking when all of a sudden I saw a squirrel. The squirrel was picking hazelnuts but when he saw us he ran up the tree.

The squirrel was brown and had a bushy tail. The squirrel looked so cute. That was the last I saw of him.

THE MUSKRAT

by **Josephine Kruppie**, age 12, Yellow Creek

One day I was coming from the garden when all of a sudden I saw something run under the steps. I went to the steps and looked under. I saw something but I could not figure out what it was. I ran in and told my mom. I came out later and looked under. It was still there so I decided I'd wait until it came out. I could tell it was a muskrat because I saw its large front teeth. It came out later and ran away.

THE LITTLE PIGS

by **Gordon Orenchuk**, age 12, Yellow Creek

One day the mother sow had little pigs. We went away from home and came back. We forgot about the little pigs until night came. Before my mom and dad were gone to bed I popped out of bed and told dad about the pigs. He jumped out of the chair and ran to see the little ones. It was nine o'clock. He came back with three little pigs quite stiff. We warmed them up by the stove. By night the pigs were all over the house squealing. Now they are all right in the pig pen. I hope they don't run into a mud puddle.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

by **Lois Everett**, age 13, Strasbourg

We are always glad to see blue birds. For a few years we saw only one or two males. They appeared to go in the loft of the barn to nest but we couldn't find where they nested. We live north and east of Strasbourg where it is hilly and bushy.

On a cold and windy day in April my mom and I saw eleven swallows which sat huddled up on the wires. They wouldn't fly away. They had white breasts.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE JUNIOR NATURALISTS PAGE

Send your illustration, stories and letters about nature to Mrs. Joy Deutscher, 7200 6th Avenue, Regina. We will be looking forward to hearing from you.