

Letters and Notes

RACHEL CARSON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

On the seacoast of Maine on June 27, 1970, the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge was officially dedicated by the American Secretary of the Interior, Walter J. Hickel. In his dedication speech, Mr. Hickel said that because of the fame of *Silent Spring*, much of the world remembers Rachel Carson as "a crusading prophet — the last angry woman, so to speak." He added, however, that friends who knew her better saw her as sensitive and creative with a great sense of humour. Ill-fitted physically for outdoor research, she persevered because she loved her work and the marvels of the living universe. In her day-to-day observations, she gradually grew aware that something was going wrong — that man was committing biological suicide. Fact piled upon fact in her calm, scientific mind. Effects called for causes and she found them. She also found that nothing was being done about it. It was then that she went on the attack, and the rest is history.

Few individuals have been recognized by their contemporaries as has Rachel Carson. But perhaps more than all the other tributes paid her, she would have cherished the dedication to her of the refuge close to Upper Wells Marsh, where the sea has surrendered the land over eons of time, and where a small expanse of this earth is being dedicated to its original role—as a resting and feeding place for migratory waterfowl, a home for marsh species, a nursery for many forms of marine life, and also a refuge for people.

In dedicating the refuge, Mr. Hickel also called for a re-dedication of its users, to a better understanding of man's relationship to his environment, on the national and international level. And he promised to travel through the States to do a series of environmental inspections around the nation. Here in Canada we sense the same growing

public awareness of the problems that Rachel Carson was sensitive to, and we welcome the recent concern shown by the conference of provincial premiers that the Canadian government should begin to take national responsibility for these matters.

COMMON BUSHTIT

As a follow-up to the photograph of the bushtit's nest in the June issue of the *Blue Jay* I must report on my little bushtits which built a hanging nest seven feet up in our Arbutus tree. They hatched five or six babies assisted by me (I chased the cats). There was a period of fierce activity while they were feeding them and I saw them better then. I saw one of them beside a chickadee and the chickadee looked like a giant. When the babies were all flying about (playing tag yet!) I saw a large hole in the side of the nest. The next day the nest fell off the branch. It had lasted as long as it was needed — neat, I call it. When I examined it thoroughly, I discovered it to be the softest, warmest, lightest thing. I also wondered if the parent birds had broken it open to launch the babies. They all departed soon after but appeared again about two weeks later and had a hearty feed of aphids off the roses. That is the last I saw of them. (It was also the last I saw of the three cats who had been here daily.)—*Della Allen, Vancouver.*

DECLINING BIRD LIFE

Like Rachel Carson whose book made the first really effective case against DDT I am pretty well sure that DDT is the villain that caused so many of our birds to disappear or decline in numbers in the district in which I live. DDT has been used against the woodborer moth which affected pine forests. The infected areas were sprayed from the air with planes equipped with spray equipment.

Shortly after, in this same area, when the DDT got into the streams and waters stocked with fish, the fish started to die off, particularly fingerlings. Some of the bigger fish that survived spawned eggs which weren't fertile and wouldn't hatch. Similarly, birds affected by DDT also lay infertile eggs, a fact which threatens the survival of the species.

Since DDT is now banned from the market, I am wondering how long it will be before the residual effects of the pesticide will disappear.

In the period 1928-1945, in my area, which is located in the western part of central Alberta, there were many more species of birds than there are today. As a schoolboy, I used to build bird houses which were often occupied by tree swallows, which I have not now seen for at least two years. The mountain bluebird used to be common here, but during the last few years I have seen only one pair of them around and the bluebird houses haven't been occupied by them for at least two years. I remember in the 1930's and 1940's the nighthawks were numerous, and their nests were found on the ground in wooded clearings, roadsides and wild pasture lands. Since 1950 I have not seen the nighthawk.

Other birds that have declined or disappeared from this area are as follows:

1. Hairy Woodpecker, disappeared
2. Sharp-tailed Grouse, disappeared
3. Brown-headed Cowbird, disappeared
4. Red-winged Blackbird, declining
5. Brewer's Blackbird, disappeared
6. Rusty Blackbird, disappeared
7. Eastern Kingbird, declining
8. Saw-whet Owl, disappearing
9. Common Loon, disappearing
10. Bald Eagle, disappearing
1. Blue Jay, declining
2. Long-billed Dowitcher, disappeared
3. American Avocet, disappearing
4. Ring-necked Pheasant, declining
5. American Redstart, declining

16. Short-eared Owl, disappeared
17. Pigeon Hawk, disappeared
18. Hawk Owl, disappeared
19. Sharp-shinned Hawk, disappeared
20. Cooper's Hawk, declining.—*Helge S. Abrahamson*, Box 268, Sylvan Lake, Alberta.

RAILROAD RIGHT-OF-WAYS

I have long had the impression that the best example of conservation of habitat of wild flowers is the sloped ungrazed banks of the railway embankments cutting across our provinces. Wild flora grows as it lists, according to natural wind and weather. The cattle are fenced away from the lethal approach of the trains (though the menace lessens year by year). But these strips of virgin sod and grassland certainly contain more different root systems of various wild flowers than roadsides or headlands to fields.

Wild strawberries used to like the slope of the CPR or CNR tracks when I was younger and one had a slope to lie along while squinting for the best berries at eye level.

It has often been in my mind that it will be a pity if, when the tracks are taken up (as present trends seem to suggest they will be) the embankments are not retained as wild flower habitats.—*Mrs. Marion Nixon*, Redvers, Sask.

CHILDHOOD INTEREST RENEWED

A year ago I found two copies of *The Birds of North America* in a Weyburn bookstore, and I bought them for my two nephews for Christmas to further their interest in birds. Now I want a third copy for myself, for through the boys' interest in birds a somewhat flagging interest on my own part has become renewed.

As a young lad, I was extremely interested in birds and as soon as I had nickels and dimes enough saved up, I purchased a set of Reed's "Pocket Bird Guides"—then the standard birders' books—and also a copy of Taverner's *Birds of Eastern Canada*; all three of

which I still have, though they are considerably the worse for wear.

Later, my interest swung more in the direction of wild plants, a childhood interest which becomes increasingly worthwhile as time goes on. I will have to make it a point to attend one of your summer conventions and go on a field trip with one or more of your experienced botanists. I think I should enjoy that immensely.

I have just finished reading the "Twenty-five Years" history of the Regina Natural History Society, and have become intrigued by the several references to a little Arcadia or natural Utopia called "Hidden Valley". When I come to Regina, I should like to visit this spot, and I should also like to see the Wascana Waterfowl Sanctuary.

Speaking of waterfowl, I should like to mention the number of geese seen here in the past spring migration. I haven't seen so many flocks passing over since the twenties, and I'm left wondering whether they have taken a new migration route, since our prairie sloughs have become flooded, or whether the population has increased to such a marked extent. The latter would seem to be rather unlikely but anyway it is certainly nice to see so many again.—
John A. Kurbs, Lampman.

CO-OPERATIVE SPRING MIGRATION STUDY

In March of this year, we again requested *Blue Jay* readers to co-operate in the continent-wide migration survey. Since then we have learned that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is no longer sponsoring the scheme and hence records for these selected species will no longer have the same significance. The *Blue Jay* has therefore regretfully decided not to print these lists, and sends apologies to those observers who once again co-operated in submitting their reports. Please come to the Annual Meeting prepared to discuss whether the Society should itself sponsor some similar project in the future.

1971 BOOKINGS

The following items must be purchased by our BOOKSHOP in quantities, and unsold stock is not returnable. Members are asked to book their requirements before September 30 so that adequate stock may be brought in well before Christmas. Bills will be sent with purchases. Order from The *Blue Jay Bookshop*, Box 1121, Regina, Sask.

"BEAUTIFUL CANADA" Calendar, 1971. 12 magnificent colour photos across Canada..... \$1.00
BIRD WATCHERS DATE BOOK—this favorite has dated spaces for daily jottings and weekly notes. Price not firm, about \$1.85

RENEW NOW!

Please renew your SNHS subscription-membership for 1971 as soon as possible instead of waiting until late December. This will distribute the work of processing memberships so that they will not pile up in the busy pre-Christmas season when mail is slow. It will also help our volunteer office workers, and save the time and money required to invoice you.

Please indicate whether your subscription-membership is a renewal or a new membership (i.e., not a member in 1970). See back cover for fee rates, and the Treasurer's new address. Cheques should be made out to the Saskatchewan Natural History Society.

Supporting (\$5.00) and *Sustaining* (\$10.00) memberships are most welcome for the financing of special SNHS projects, since the regular \$3.00 fee barely covers the cost of printing and mailing the Society's publications. A receipt for income tax purposes will be sent for any contribution over the \$3.00 fee.

ANNUAL MEETING

The SNHS holds its annual meeting this year, October 16-17 in Saskatoon. There will be registration and an informal social hour Friday evening. There will be business, entertainment and coffee all day Saturday. Watch the *Newsletter* for further details.