

Letters

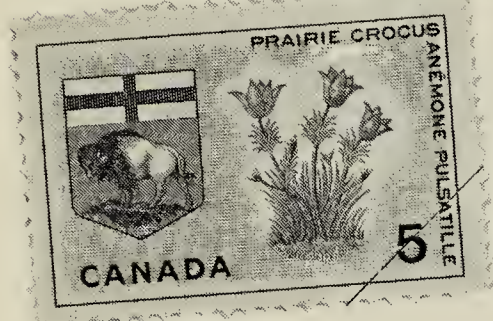
NATURE ON STAMPS

The first letter is FROM the editor, rather than TO him. I'd like to comment on the stamp that you see — and don't see — on this page. We have tried to illustrate some of the Saskatchewan Natural History Society's interests with the stamps: birds and endangered species (Whooping Crane), mammals (Moose), the Prairie Provinces (grain-field patchwork), conservation of natural resources (Resources for Tomorrow Conference), the North (river, forest and mountain), plants (Prairie Crocus), nature preserves (park), insects and other vertebrates (butterflies), reptiles, amphibians, fish and prehistoric life (dinosaur). B. Millar deserves the credit for helping to select the stamps and for supplying them.

What about the stamps you don't see? Or, What about the three foreign Stamps? It was a real disappointment to find that Canada, with one of the finest park and animal reserve systems in the world, does not have a single stamp, let alone a series, featuring this important aspect of our culture. We found such stamps from the United States, Russia and elsewhere but finally settled on one from Rwanda which, like other so-called "under-developed" African nations, has no development that our "developed" country does not have — grassland parks. And isn't it a shame that Canada, with some of the finest fossil deposits in the world, has never devoted one more than 1,000 postage stamps to its prehistoric animal life! Finally, it was a surprise not only to find that there is such a place as Herm, a half-size nation piece of the Channel Islands, but also that at least one of its 108 stamps depicts insects, including a Monarch Butterfly. A careful search of Canada's postage stamps would suggest that we are an insect-free nation.

People can learn much about a country from its stamps. However, Canada's stamps give the rest of the world a distorted view of our sensitivity to our environment. SNHS and similar societies probably bring about a remedy for this situation. If so, then, within a year or two, we might not have to go around the world for stamps to express Canadian interests in Canada's environment.

Editor



CAN'T WHOOPING CRANES BE PROTECTED ON PRIVATE LAND?

I am writing in regard to the group of three Whooping Cranes that remained in our district from September 26 to October 10, 1972.

For the first few days almost no one heard of them because they were away from a well travelled road, but soon they established their headquarters on a small field next to a grid road. On September 29 an Audubon member, Mr. John Bode of 64 Lloyd Ave., Greenvale, Long Island, New York, arrived by lucky chance and he literally stayed with the birds for 6 days, sleeping in his car each night. He is an artist and photographer and was keenly interested in getting photographs and seeing that no one bothered the birds. On October 4, he had to leave and I, along with other interested neighbors, tried to keep watch but in spite of our efforts thoughtless and curious passers-by would drive into the feeding ground and frighten the birds, some to try to get closer and others to make them fly.

Bob Turner of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History spent a couple of days observing the cranes, and a federal game officer from Edmonton watched them for one morning.

One incident which really worried us was a report that two vehicles had driven in and five men with guns were walking towards the birds. At this I phoned the police who said they'd try to keep watch but couldn't keep watch all the time. Then I phoned the Conservation Officer who drove out later the same day and saw that the birds had returned. People continued to disturb the birds so I phoned him again and tried to persuade him to put up signs at the entrance to the trail which led into the field. He said he didn't know what to put on such signs, that he didn't believe he had the right to put them up and that only the land owner could object to people entering his field. He said maybe the five men with guns were just hunting other birds in the field. I told him that I definitely wasn't so because in all the

time Mr. Bode and myself had watched that field, absolutely no other game birds had landed there. He did send out a young DNR helper to put up signs late the next day. (October 10). Unhappily, someone had been chasing the birds that morning and they had already left the area at about 10 a.m. I do hope they are now safely on their way to their winter home.

I do feel that if our beautiful cranes aren't given more protection than the authorities have given them here, there is no chance of their surviving. I know the territory is large and the game wardens have many duties but why couldn't local interested and dedicated people be given authority to protect the birds? I stopped one car load of people and they were most indignant, although they did as I asked.

I would be grateful if someone could answer these questions:

1. Who is directly responsible for the safety of the cranes while they are here?

2. Is the hunting supposed to carry on as usual, even into the field where cranes are feeding?

3. Can't signs be put up to keep people out of the fields whether or not the owner agrees? (In this case the owner had no objection).

4. What does the term "molesting the birds" mean? I asked the Conservation officer and he said the courts would have to decide that.

I do think more careful guarding is necessary along the migration route. It almost seems a crane has to be shot before any action is taken — and then it is too late. — *Mrs. Edith Gardiner, Box 159, Kindersley, Sask.*

TO WALK IN THE WOODS

The following story is one which I wrote for school. You may find it suitable to make people understand or appreciate our natural surroundings, if you wish, edit it, if not, fine. Here goes:

A walk in the woods can stir your heart in many different ways, depending on the season.

To walk in the woods in spring is to hear the birds singing in the trees, and the flow of fresh, clear, cool water. To walk in the woods in spring is to see the snow leaving right before your eyes; to observe as the buds of trees and sprouts of grass have the slightest tint of green; to taste the air and feel a sense of a new beginning in your heart.

To walk in the woods in summer is to feel alive again; to see the insects, trees, grass, flowers, and all things that exist with you; to hear the rustle as a deer runs close by; to hear the Robin and its young. To walk in the woods in summer is to love what you sense with a warmth received from the sun.

To walk in the woods in fall is to see the earth preparing for a long winter's sleep. The birds are flocking, and the animals that stay are gathering food, for they sense the earth's hibernation, too. Just hear their busy chatter. Listen! Can't you hear the squirrels working their way across the leaf-covered ground? Can't you hear the leaves grumble and the wind rustle, as it throws many more to the ground?

To walk in the woods in winter is to see death, hear silence, and know that the earth is asleep. — *Roberta Smith (Age 14), Endeavour, Sask.*

THE TWO LITTLE ORPHANS

On one of our field trips, Mr. Lane, Chris Martin and I found a nestbox with two baby Mountain Bluebirds in it. The nest was in bad shape. It was all torn up and the babies were dying of hunger. We went on in the hope of finding a nest of Mountain Bluebirds with babies in it of the same size. We were trying to find foster parents for the two little orphans.

A little way down the road were three nests at the corner. The three of us split up to check the boxes. Chris found a nest with six Eastern Bluebirds, Mr. Lane's box had Tree Swallows and in mine I found six Mountain Bluebirds. This one was just right and we all went back and took the two little birds to the

new nest. Unfortunately, it was too late. When we went back a week later the little birds were not there. They must have died and the parent birds had taken them away. — *Steven McFarlane (Age 9), 243 - 17th Street, Brandon.*

PRESERVE

ROAD ALLOWANCES

BY HUGO TIESSEN*

The use of chemical sprays to destroy the vegetation along road allowances is quite common in many of the Rural Municipalities of Saskatchewan. I am not aware of the scope of this spraying program, but I will relate my experiences in connection with it.

Near Nisbet Provincial Forest, south of Shellbrook, a conservation-minded farmer and I toured several scenic road allowances, some of which were sprayed. The beauty of these trails was quite startling; aspens, willows and several varieties of shrubs grew alongside the faintly marked trails. Those road allowances that were sprayed appeared hideous and sickly. In comparison, the leaves of the trees were brown and curled over.

The intention of the spray was to destroy the trees and shrubs immediately alongside the trail so that farmers could transport their farm equipment over the route to their farmland. In this case, the idea of destroying the vegetation for this purpose seemed completely pointless. It was told that adjacent roads provided the farmers adequate access to their land. Besides, it would be impossible to bring wide farm machinery along the trails because the spray did not reach the trunks and branches of the trees and shrubs.

The chemical spray had the effect of damaging an otherwise scenic landscape. Along the road allowance one could see a sharp transition between the sickly vegetation and the healthy vegetation.

While driving throughout Saskatchewan one can see many road allowances

*2604 Cascade St., Saskatoon.



in a natural state except for two ruts in the center. In many instances, the vegetation on either side of the trail has been unaltered by man. Although road allowances are only 99 feet wide, they often play an important role in providing a habitat for insects, birds and small mammals.

Rather than be destructive and waste a great amount of money destroying the countryside, municipalities should attempt to preserve these trails. Often the road allowance is the last remaining area of natural vegetation, as the remainder of the land has yielded to the plow and is used for agricultural purposes. I suggest that each municipality should attempt to preserve at least 10 per cent of road allowance which have scenic qualities — flowers, grass, bushes and trees. This would prevent the use of chemical sprays and road-building equipment from destroying trails designated for this purpose. This should be possible because many of these trails are located in remote areas of the municipality and, consequently, there would be little pressure to improve them.

The need to preserve these trails is obvious. Although the program would be small in stature, it would be another method of attempting to preserve scenic areas in our landscape from wanton

destruction. Such areas would provide an ideal place where people could go for a quiet walk in the countryside to enjoy the splendour of nature.

GREATER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

AT LEADER, SASKATCHEWAN

BY DAVID R. M. HATCH*

At noon on November 3, 1972, as I was eating dinner in a cafe in Leader, Saskatchewan, I overheard three American hunters discussing a grouse they could not identify and had shot earlier that day. I asked to see the bird and they showed it to me. It proved to be a Greater Prairie Chicken. The bird, an adult male, had a short, rounded tail, which consisted of 18 rectrices that were deep brown in colour and tipped by white. With the exception of the primaries, secondaries, tail and neck-feathers (pinnae), nearly all the other feathers were barred by white and brown in equal proportions. On each side of the neck was a set of elongated, rigid, pointed feathers. These pinnae were dark brown and each covered a patch of bare orange skin. Above the eye

*Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature,
190 Rupert Avenue,
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 0N2.

was a much smaller patch of bare orange skin. This bird showed no hybrid characteristics.

Besides the Greater Prairie Chicken, these hunters had seven Sharp-tailed Grouse in their possession. The Prairie Chicken was midway in size between the largest and the smallest of these Sharp-tailed Grouse. The hunters had seen no other grouse of this type during the day and this particular Prairie Chicken was a lone bird flushed from a small bluff. The hunters claimed to have shot the Prairie Chicken 10 miles due east of Leader; however, when I showed them that location on a detailed topographical map they were a little vague in confirming it.

I tried unsuccessfully to get the hunters to give the Prairie Chicken to me so it could be presented to the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History as a study skin. Upon discovering the significance of their kill they decided to keep the bird and have it mounted.

This is the first time in at least 20 years that a Prairie Chicken taken in Saskatchewan has been examined in the hand. This record lends further support to a recent well documented sighting of a Greater Prairie Chicken near Mortlach, Saskatchewan, reported by Frank Brazier in the September, 1972, *Blue Jay*.



Prairie Chicken

Fred Lahrman

OWL Notes

BY EVELYN CASSON*

Last winter my sister and her husband did not return to the farm until April. They were surprised to find that, in spite of the fact that the rabbits were so plentiful around the countryside, their fruit trees and bushes had not been harmed. This seemed strange as so many people had lost fruit trees and raspberry canes from the ravages of rabbits. It didn't take them long, however, to discover the reason. High up in a large spruce tree about 10 feet from a bedroom window they discovered a Great Horned Owl nesting.

The female was a large owl of a dark gray colour touched with white here and there, with an under coat of buff showing through. Her "horns" were large, prominent tufts. The male was a beautiful golden owl, large, but not quite so large as the female.

Day after day we watched with great interest as the owls incubated the eggs in the sloppy, carelessly built nest, which looked as if it would collapse in the first strong wind. We did not climb up to see how many eggs there were for obvious reasons; but finally one day our patience was rewarded! We discovered two fluffy white heads peeping out of the nest.

When the nestlings were only a few days old, a big wind and rain storm came up. The next morning, when we looked out, there appeared to be a bit of white rabbit fur on the ground under the tree. On further investigation we found "the fur" to be one of the nestlings which must have blown out of the nest during the storm and died.

This left only one little one. The next few days later, much to our consternation, we discovered the other little owl on the ground, but apparently unharmed. Covered with a soft, white fluff he was about as big as a half-grown chicken. The large yellow eyes stared with deep distrust, and the sharp, strong claws and beak (which he knew how to use if one was foolish enough to come too near) were evident.

*Medstead, Saskatchewan

For the first few weeks on the ground he seemed to think that the tree was his own special one, for he snuggled up to it and did not move very far from it. Each morning about 5 o'clock the parents would be on hand with breakfast. The mother carried the food, nearly always a rabbit, to the foot of the tree and would begin tearing it into pieces and literally jamming it into her baby while the father kept guard from the house or tree top.

What huge meals the baby ate and how he grew! After the meal was finished the mother would clear the rubbish away and leave her baby on his own. He would preen his feathers and tidy up, baby that he was, and then would sleep and yawn, sleep and yawn the day away.

Toward evening he would start to get restless and start calling. The sound he made was not a hoot but a sort of a bark that sounded for all the world like, "Wha-a-t!" Finally about dusk his mother would arrive and serve another huge meal.

In a few weeks baby owl was almost the size of a full-grown chicken, and was covered with grey and white feathers. He could fluff out his feathers to make himself look big and fierce when anyone came near and snap his beak and hiss at any intruder. Nearby, the parents, hidden from sight, would send out warning calls — a sort of barking sound — two chirps and then a snapping of their strong, cruel beaks.

About this time the baby owl began walking around. He would toddle off on his two unsteady, feathery legs, stumbling along among the tall grass and weeds for all the world like a fat, little baby. One day you would find him out in the field across the road, another time way over under the trees in the poplar thicket. Although you did not always see the mother, you knew by her calls that she was keeping careful watch. By this time the father must have gone for there had been no sign of him for many days.

Finally, when the baby owl was about a month old and beginning to look quite grown-up, we missed him. We hunted and hunted and were about to give up

when we suddenly came upon him up in a tree about 10 feet from the ground. He had crept up a little dead tree that was slanted over and touching his nest tree and there he perched, by turns sleeping, yawning and preening his feathers. At this point he spent much time exercising his big, strong wings. He would stretch them out to their fullest length and then flap them vigorously, all the while stretching up onto his tiptoes.

A few days later we found him perched on an old wagon gear. He watched our approach, staring unblinkingly with his huge golden eyes until we were within about 5 feet of him. Suddenly he stretched up on tiptoes and, spreading his wings, swept away into the woods as silently as a shadow.

When two months old and apparently full grown he would often sit around the dugout on a post, preening his feathers or sleeping, but when night came he would begin his hoarse barking call. Since he did not seem to be fed any longer by his mother, he must have been catching his own food.

One night we began to hear the young owl continually calling "Wha-a-a-t, Wha-a-at" and then become quiet as if he were listening for an answer. Finally off in the woods, across the road, there came a deep "Whoo! Whoo!" and with what seemed to us a note of pure joy he called "Wha-a-t! Wha-a-t! Wha-a-t!" and sped away toward the sound like a silent grey streak.

FIRST REPORT OF A GOLDEN-CROWNED SPARROW AT CALGARY, ALBERTA

BY HAROLD W. PINEL* and
CAROL J. ROBINSON**

On October 12 and 13, 1972, we observed a Golden-crowned Sparrow at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary at Calgary. It was first noticed at 1:50 p.m. on October 12 at a feeding station in the company of a single White-throated Sparrow. At 12:45 p.m. on Oc-

*1017-19th Ave., N.W., Calgary, Alberta.

**Group Box 3, 9th Ave. and 22nd St., S.E., Calgary, Alberta.

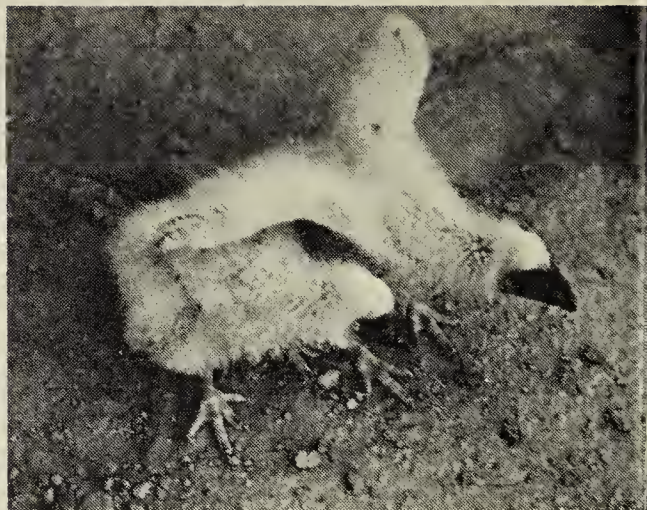
tober 13, the sparrow was seen again at the feeder, this time in the company of about 40 House Sparrows, a Black-billed Magpie and a female Ring-necked Pheasant. The Golden-crowned Sparrow was observed at intervals throughout the rest of the afternoon on October 13, either at the feeder or in adjacent shrubbery.

The standard field guides were used to identify the sparrow.^{2 3} The distinctive pattern and colours of the crown were noted: briefly, the crown was brown with the forecrown being a dull yellow color, making the bird an immature or a winter adult. The second winter plumage as depicted in one book is a close representation of the bird seen by us.³ Other features noted were two white wing bars, a dusky bill and a faintly barred chest.

This appears to be the first record for the Calgary area and the second known record away from the mountains in Alberta.⁴ The other non-montane report is by M. Cole of Red Deer who observed three Golden-crowned Sparrows at her feeding station in October, 1939.¹ Associated with the Golden-crowned Sparrows were Slate-colored Juncos, a small flock of Oregon Juncos, a few Song Sparrows, and about 12 White-crowned Sparrows and House Sparrows.

¹Cole, M. P. 1941. Bird visitors at Red Deer, Alberta. *Can. Field-Nat.* 55:5.
²Peterson, R. T. 1969. A field guide to western birds. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.
³Robbins, C. S., B. Bruun, H. Zim and A. Singer. 1966. *Birds of North America*. Golden Press, New York.
⁴Salt, W. R., and A. L. Wilk. 1966. *The birds of Alberta*. Gov't of Alberta, Dept. of Ind. and Devel. Queen's Printer, Edmonton.

Ever seen a bluejay questionnaire?
Check the first and last pages
of this issue.



Young Turkey Vultures C. S. Houston
 July 16, 1972

**CAVE-NESTING
 TURKEY VULTURES
 OF THE SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN**

BY JOE W. SCHMIDT*

One weekend at the end of May 1972, I was driving my dune-bug along the South Saskatchewan river valley in the Lancer area. Since an adult Turkey Vulture had been spotted by Gordie Johnson the week before, the two of us, with Ian Harnett and Carl Fuller, looked for a suitable nesting site. We found a large cave in the river cliff and, as we approached, the female was flying out. Two eggs were being incubated about 4 feet in from the cave mouth. This was not only the first nest but the first vulture I had ever seen. This was quite an experience for me.

Dr. Stuart Houston had told me on one of our trips a few years ago, that vultures had been sighted along the river valley, but he had never seen a nest personally. We returned with Dr. Houston on June 18 to find the eggs had not hatched. On our final visit on July 16, he banded the two young, adding a new species to his banding list.

NOTE: Frank Martens of Spiritwood Conservation Officer Les Arndt found an occupied Turkey Vulture nest on an island at Chitek Lake in 1970. It was a burrow about 10 inches in diameter on a 60-degree-slope bank near the shore. Adult vultures had been seen around the island for two summers previously — S. D. Riome. (Previous Saskatchewan nesting records of 1969 were summarized in the *Blue Jay* 27 — Ed.)

*3456 Caen St., Saskatoon

SIGHT RECORD OF THE FERRUGINOUS HAWK BRITISH COLUMBIA

BY PETER L. McLAREN and
MARGARET A. McLAREN*

The Ferruginous Hawk is an uncommon raptor of the plains of North America. The breeding range of the species extends south from eastern Washington, southern Alberta, southern Saskatchewan and southwestern Manitoba.¹ Its status in British Columbia is hypothetical, based on several sight records at Osoyoos in 1922 and another at Sumas in 1866.²

At 9:30 a.m. on August 12, 1972, while driving along the trans-Canada highway in Yoho National Park, we observed an adult male Ferruginous Hawk soaring overhead at the western tip of Wapta Lake, about 9 miles from the eastern boundary of the park. We watched the bird for about 15 minutes with the aid of 7 x 35 binoculars, at distances as little as 30 feet. The sky was cloudless and the sun was directly at our backs. During the course of its circlings we were provided with excellent views of both the ventral and dorsal portions of the body and we noted all the key identification points for this species: the whitish tail, the dark V formed by the feathers of the legs, the rufous elbows and the dorsal wing windows.

The sighting of this bird represents the first record of the species for Yoho National Park (D. H. MacMillan, Park wpt., pers. comm.). Its presence in the Canadian Rockies is not unknown, the species having the status of a rare visitor to both Banff and Jasper National Parks. It is possible that these appearances in the mountains are the results of post-breeding wanderings by members of the breeding population in southern Alberta.

Down, L., and A. Amadon. 1968. *Eagles, Hawks and Falcons of the World*. 2 vol. (945 pp.). McGraw-Hill, New York.

Junco, J. A., and I. McT. Cowan. 1947. *A Review of the Bird Fauna of British Columbia*. 285 pp. British Columbia Provincial Museum Special Publication No. 2.

Royal Ontario Museum and Department of Zoology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario

A RECENT BLACK-FOOTED FERRET RECORD FOR SOUTHERN ALBERTA

BY HAROLD W. PINEL*

On the morning of August 9, 1972, my wife, my brother-in-law and I left Elkwater in the Cypress Hills to go bird-watching in the Manyberries-Pakowki Lake area of southeastern Alberta. At 1:20 p.m., we reached the west end of Pakowki Lake some 7 miles south of the nearest town, Etzikom. At 1:30 p.m., my brother-in-law discovered the carcass of a mammal about 4 feet above the ground on the top of a concrete piling supporting the bridge which crosses over the lake. After close scrutiny of the carcass, I identified it as that of the rare Black-footed Ferret. To confirm the identification, I walked back to the car to get *The Mammals of Alberta*.² *The identification was verified.*

The long slim body, the stubby muzzle, the black-tipped tail, the black feet and legs, and the diagnostic black face mask were all noted. The dental formula was even checked and turned out to be $\frac{3-1-3-1}{3-1-3-2} = 34$ which is characteristic of some members of the weasel family, the Black-footed Ferret being one. The death was not recent because pelage was lacking in the throat, neck, chest, and flank regions, and because part of a pigeon nest containing two eggs was situated on the lower back and upper legs region of the body. I couldn't determine the cause of death.

There are few records of the Black-footed Ferret in Alberta. J. D. Soper states "Seton . . . refers to a specimen from Calgary recorded in D. G. Elliot's *Catalogue of Mammals of the Field Museum*, 1907, p. 448. Anderson (1946) mentions a specimen collected in 1907 on the Blackfoot Reserve, near Gleichen, and another at Rosebud. Since that time extensive field work by field-naturalists in southern Alberta has apparently failed to detect further occurrences." Since 1964, however, there has been another sighting of the Black-

*1017-19 Ave. N. W.,
Calgary, Alberta.

footed Ferret in Alberta besides that made by me. At 4:30 p.m. on September 13, 1967, Dr. M. Skirrow clearly observed a Black-footed Ferret running across the road one mile north of Connemara which is approximately 40 miles south of Calgary (Calgary Field Naturalists' Society records). In adjacent south-western Saskatchewan, the Black-footed Ferret has been recorded *in the past from 15 different localities.*¹

Based on the fact that the main food supply of the Black-footed Ferret is the prairie dog, a species which has not been definitely recorded for Alberta, and the fact that so few records exist for the ferret in southern Alberta, I agree with Soper (1964) in concluding that the few occurrences should be regarded as purely extralimital.

Ed Note: We hope that the specimen was collected and deposited in a museum. This should be done with any rare or endangered species found dead. Even the skeleton or a part of it is worth preserving. If the animal is too big or it is otherwise impractical to pick it up immediately, the nearest wildlife official should be notified.

¹Beck, W. H. 1958, *A Guide to Saskatchewan Mammals*, Spec. Publ. No. 1, Sask. Nat. Hist. Soc., Regina.

²Soper, J. D. 1964. *The Mammals of Alberta*. Gov't of Alberta, Dept. Ind. and Devel., Queen's Printer, Edmonton.

DOMESTIC CAT CATCHES A VARIETY OF WILDLIFE

BY DENNIS C. JOYES*

(NOTE: This article from outside our usual area is included in hopes of encouraging people from the Prairies and North to let us know about their observations on the food of domestic cats. Ed.)

A domestic cat recently arrived at our ranch and gave birth to a litter of kittens. The cat was apparently accustomed to living in the wild for she was extremely wary and preferred to hunt in the surrounding fields and pastures.

*Westby, Montana

When I first saw her she was feeding on a road-killed Whitetail Jackrabbit. Later she was seen bringing in young jackrabbits, deer mice and shrews but her favorite hunting ground was a colony of Richardson's Ground Squirrels. I once counted nine fresh killed ground squirrels in the old barn where she had her kittens.

Not content with only gophers she once caught a full grown Pintail possibly while the duck was on its nest. Small birds were also hunted especially House Sparrows, Western Kingbirds and Brewer's Blackbirds which are abundant around ranch shelterbelts and corrals. The nests of House Sparrows were often accessible and once located were usually raided until empty.

The cat was once seen eating a Smooth Green Snake but she avoided frogs and salamanders. The only insects I observed being eaten were black crickets.

It did not occur to me at the time to attempt to enumerate the prey brought in by "Mama," as the cat came to be called, but she did provide a random sample of the species hunted by domestic cats on the prairies. Similar food habits have been recorded for cats in Oklahoma, California and Texas although with local rather than northern Plains species represented.^{3 2 4} Instances of cats preying on ducks, however, are not well known and have been confirmed, so far as I know, only by E. Hubbs.² Ducks eaten in T. Eberhard's sample were thought to have been carrion or garbage.¹

¹Eberhard, Thomas. 1954. Food Habits of Prairie House Cats. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 18: 286.

²Hubbs, E. L. 1951. Food Habits of Feral House Cats in the Sacramento Valley. *California Fish and Game* 37: 177-189.

³McMurray, F. B. and C. C. Sperry. 1941. Food Habits of Feral House Cats in Oklahoma, A Progress Report. *J. of Mammalogy* 22: 185-190.

⁴Parmalee, P. W. 1953. Food Habits of the Prairie House Cat in East-Central Texas. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 17: 375-376.

VARIATIONS IN

FIREWEED and BLUEBERRY

BY MRS. H. D. BOBIER*

For many years there has been a patch of white Fireweed growing by a roadside in Rapid View, Saskatchewan. The purple variety grows beside it but there does not seem to be any cross-pollination as the white flowers never have a trace of pink or mauve. The leaves and stems are also a brighter green. This variety apparently does not seed readily as there are never more than a few specimens each year.

Last August while berry-picking near the Beaver River, I came across a small patch of "black" Canada or Velvetleaf blueberries the most common species found in Saskatchewan. As far as I could see, there was no difference except the color. This was partly due to a lack of "bloom." The black berries were not as tart as the blue ones. Next spring I am going back to see if the flowers are different.

Rapid View, Sask.

30 Years Ago

THE SNOWS OF YESTERYEAR

Thirty years ago the first Christmas bird censuses were reported in the *Blue Jay*, from Nipawin, Saltcoats, Scottsboro, Skull Creek, Tullis and Yorkton, and Maurice G. Street's comment was noted as expressing the general enthusiasm for the new project: "This is the first time I have ever taken a Christmas bird census, and I was quite surprised at the number of species and individuals seen when all totalled up." Maurice's own count at Nipawin on December 26, 1942, covering an area of spruce muskegs and jackpine ridges along the Saskatchewan River, produced 18 of the total of 30 species recorded for the province: Goshawk, 1; Spruce Grouse, 1; Ruffed Grouse, 2; Willow Ptarmigan, 9; Great Horned

Owl, 3; Hairy Woodpecker, 2; Downy Woodpecker, 3; Canada Jay (as it was known then), 7; Blue Jay, 11; Magpie, 4; Black-capped Chickadee, 23; Hudsonian Chickadee, 9; Golden-crowned Kinglet, 5 (with the Editor's terse comment "no details" suggesting that this was then regarded as an unusual winter record); Bohemian Waxwing, 28; English Sparrow, 43; Evening Grosbeak, 14; Pine Grosbeak, 8; Redpoll, 271.

The *Blue Jay* in which these first counts appeared (January-March, 1943) was the second number of the first issue. The first number of this mimeographed newsletter had appeared at the end of 1942 as the "official bulletin of the Yorkton Natural History Society," having as its object "to foster an active interest in all branches of nature study, and to promote the conservation of all wild life; also to act as a connecting link between nature lovers in Saskatchewan."

In the first number the Editor, Mrs. I. M. Priestly, had explained about the Christmas Bird Census sponsored by the Audubon Society. "In Saskatchewan," she conceded, "the climate at that season of the year makes it rather difficult to comply with all regulations, one of which requires observers to be in the field for at least six hours. However, a provincial bird count of our own would be most interesting." Counters were then promised that their results would be published in the next *Blue Jay*, and the annual Saskatchewan Christmas Bird Count was born.

**Beefs or bouquets
about the "Blue Jay"?**

**Use the form at the front or back
of this issue to let us know.**