

WHAT HAPPENED TO COMET KOHOUTEK?

by G. N. PATTERSON*

The much publicized "Comet-of-the-Century" turned out to be a visual dud. What happened to it? Was the best scientific observational program a waste of time?

What actually happened is, of course, well known. It's the "Why?" that is yet unanswered. The comet brightened gradually as it approached the sun, although not as brilliant as originally forecast. It did achieve a brilliance as bright as Venus when it was close in to the sun but only the SKYLAB astronauts could see it at that time. Then, as it swung around the sun, the brilliance dropped sharply and it was only visible to the naked eye, provided you knew exactly where to look for it, for less than a week. It gradually faded in brightness until it could only be seen with the aid of binoculars or a telescope. The great sweeping tail forecast never did develop. Why?

Any answer to this question is highly speculative at this time. The recasting of a comet's brightness is always a calculated guess based on the performance of previous comets and, hence, is a very unpredictable figure. So much depends upon the constituents that form the nucleus of the comet and these can only be known after the comet has developed. In this instance, the final answer will only be known when all the observational data is recovered and analyzed and that could take up to a year or more.

What is known is that the nucleus of

Comet Kohoutek was larger than any other known comet since scientific measurements have been taken. Earth-based spectroscopic measurements have been taken showing a wide variety of chemical constituents common to other comets, plus other constituents not noticed in previous comets. The full story will only be completed once the data from SKYLAB is recovered and analyzed.

It is presently being speculated that Comet Kohoutek is a new kind of comet. The vast amount of data being obtained will result in a very intensive re-appraisal of our present concept of comets and, because of this, Comet Kohoutek can still justifiably be labelled "The Comet of the Century", even though it resulted in a very poor visual display.

30 Years Ago

Those who knew the *Blue Jay* thirty years ago will remember the stiff yellow cover with the blue lettering, on which appeared the names of the officers of the Yorkton Natural History Society and a statement of the Society's objects. The stated aim of the Society was simply expressed, but comprehensive: "To foster an active interest in every branch of nature study, and to promote the conservation of all wild life; also to act as a connecting link between nature lovers in Saskatchewan."

*Physics Department,
University of Saskatchewan,
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

By the time five numbers of the *Blue Jay* had appeared, members were beginning to express an interest in how it was published. Some members, who realized that the Society had incurred a deficit in the previous year because of the cost of publication, were able to send donations. In order to reply to those who asked how the *Blue Jay* was actually produced, Mrs. Priestly wrote in the Jan.-Feb.-Mar. 1944 issue:

... here briefly is the "set-up." Mrs. Priestly is editor and responsible for the whole job of writing it. Stuart Houston is printer and publisher. Mr. Priestly comes into the picture as copy-reader. The

"blueing" of the title letters on the front page is done by a "bee" of as many Yorkton members as can be persuaded to revert to childhood and spend an afternoon or evening crayoning. Putting the pages together and rolling the bulletin for mailing is carried out by the boys in our society — Vernon Barnes, Neil Black, Harvey Beck, Jim Smith and Michael Priestly, to whom special thanks are due. And, needless to say, no "Blue Jay" could be produced without the many interesting letters from members from all over the province, as well as suggestions received from Yorkton friends.

NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK April 8-13, 1974

The theme of National Wildlife Week this year is "Preservation of Wetland Habitat". More than 100 years ago, Henry David Thoreau wrote: "Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps . . . A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it." If you share Thoreau's feelings, then let your elected officials — city, municipal, provincial and federal — know how you feel about the environmental problem of wetland destruction. Write, phone or see them in person. (Partly from Canadian Wildlife Federation's *Wildlife News*, Autumn, 1973).

SNHS FIELD CAMPS

Grasslands camp near Val Marie in the heart of the ranching country, May 25-27. For persons interested in studying or photographing native grassland and the associated flora and fauna, including prairie dogs in the Society's Prairie Dog Sanctuary.

Migration camp at the north end of

Last Mountain Lake during the Sandhill Crane migration, August 31-September 2.

Fee of \$40.00 per person. Each camp is limited to 20 persons, with places in each reserved for out-of-province registrations.

For more information —

Mrs. Jeanie Wagner,
SNHS Secretary,
University of Sask., Regina Campus
Regina, Saskatchewan.

SUMMER MEET AT ESTEVAN

Our 1974 Summer Meeting will be headquartered at Estevan. Tom Gentes is organizing a series of field trips to explore this unique area and Lloyd Peterson is working with local members to plan other program items. Please be with us on June 7-8-9.



Fred Lahrm
Dragline at strip-mining operations near Estevan, Saskatchewan.