



*A coon called Cass*

*Lorne Scott*

## A COON CALLED CASS

JOAN SCOTT, Box 995, Indian Head, Saskatchewan, S0G 2K0.

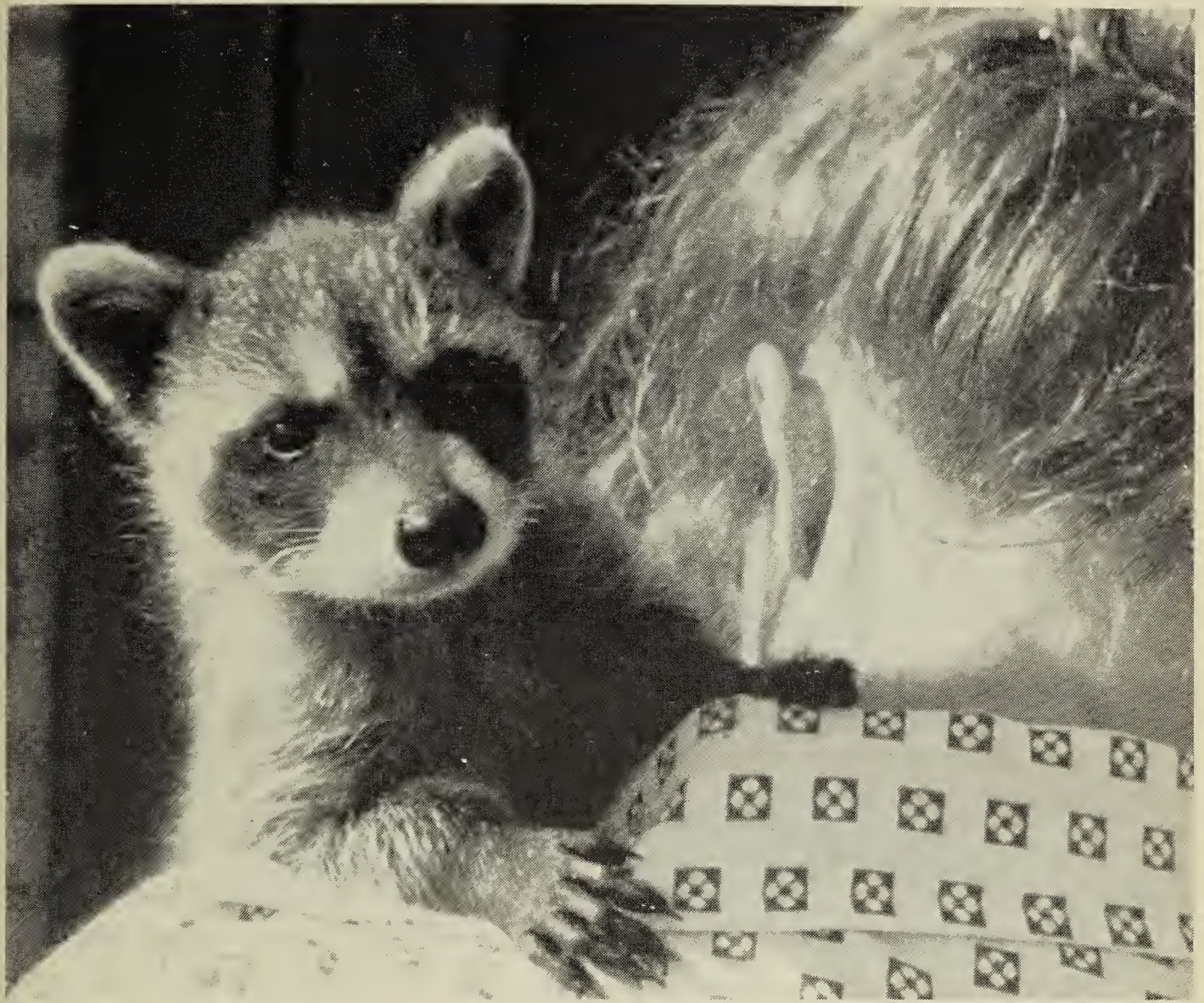
Our acquaintance with "Cass" was made in May, 1977, when a neighbour told us that he had a family of raccoons living in the attic of an old house. He thought that we might like to photograph them, and he also wanted us to help him move them out of the house. While he and my husband Lorne held the mother at bay with two pool cues, his daughter and I moved the six baby coons into a box which we left beside the house. The next morning five of the six young were gone, but the sixth was still in the box the following day, crying help-

lessly, so our neighbour brought it over to us.

The baby coon wouldn't accept milk from an eye-dropper, but we got it to take it from a baby's bottle with a long nipple. It took up residence in a laundry basket in our spare bedroom, with a heating pad and fuzzy seat cover for a bed.

Cow's milk did not agree with the coon, so I decided to consult a veterinarian to get a more suitable formula. When you visit a vet with an animal you have to register it under its name,





*Cass liked to cuddle*

*Lorne Scott*

so I laughed and christened the baby raccoon on the spot, calling it "Cass" after a big man in my husband's office whose huge hand hid it completely when he held it in his palm. When "the girl with the raccoon" was called into the office, several vets had congregated out of curiosity! They decided Cass was a female, very undernourished and dehydrated. I was given a powdered milk replacer (Isbilac) and a bottle of Kaopectate to experiment with. The Isbilac was just what she needed and she began to gain weight rapidly. For seven weeks all she did was to eat and sleep.

Lorne and I were driving into work in Regina every day from Indian Head, so we took Cass with us in order to be able to feed her every four hours. As

long as she slept through the day, she stayed with Lorne in the Wascana Waterfowl Park naturalist's office. When she started roaming about, I took her to work with me. Once her eyes opened and her ears popped out, she became a true mischievous raccoon.

Cass was soon a veteran traveller, going everywhere with us. She attended the wedding of the *Blue Jay* Editor, Gary Seib, and Barbara Shourounis in Eastend, she went to the SNHS summer meeting in Yorkton, and she made a guest appearance for a group of children at Camp McKay.

Everybody loved Cass. Even when she startled my father by leaning on the horn when he was working under



the hood of the car, she was soon forgiven when she found the watch crystal that he had lost. Her antics were priceless, and she was always busy with her "hands", even going through your pockets or feeling in your ear. Our visitors were always entertained by her, just as we were. To many prairie people, coons have been a novelty until very recently when their range has extended dramatically in southern and central Saskatchewan.

Gardening was one of Cass' favourite occupations. She would dig up potatoes at a feverish rate, and was quite disappointed when you did not pick up the ones she dug. She learned to pod peas in the twinkling of an eye, and couldn't wait for a pail of vegetables to be filled to knock it over and play field hockey with the contents. When I introduced her to corn, she went absolutely "raccoon-silly", knocking over stocks and attacking the husks.

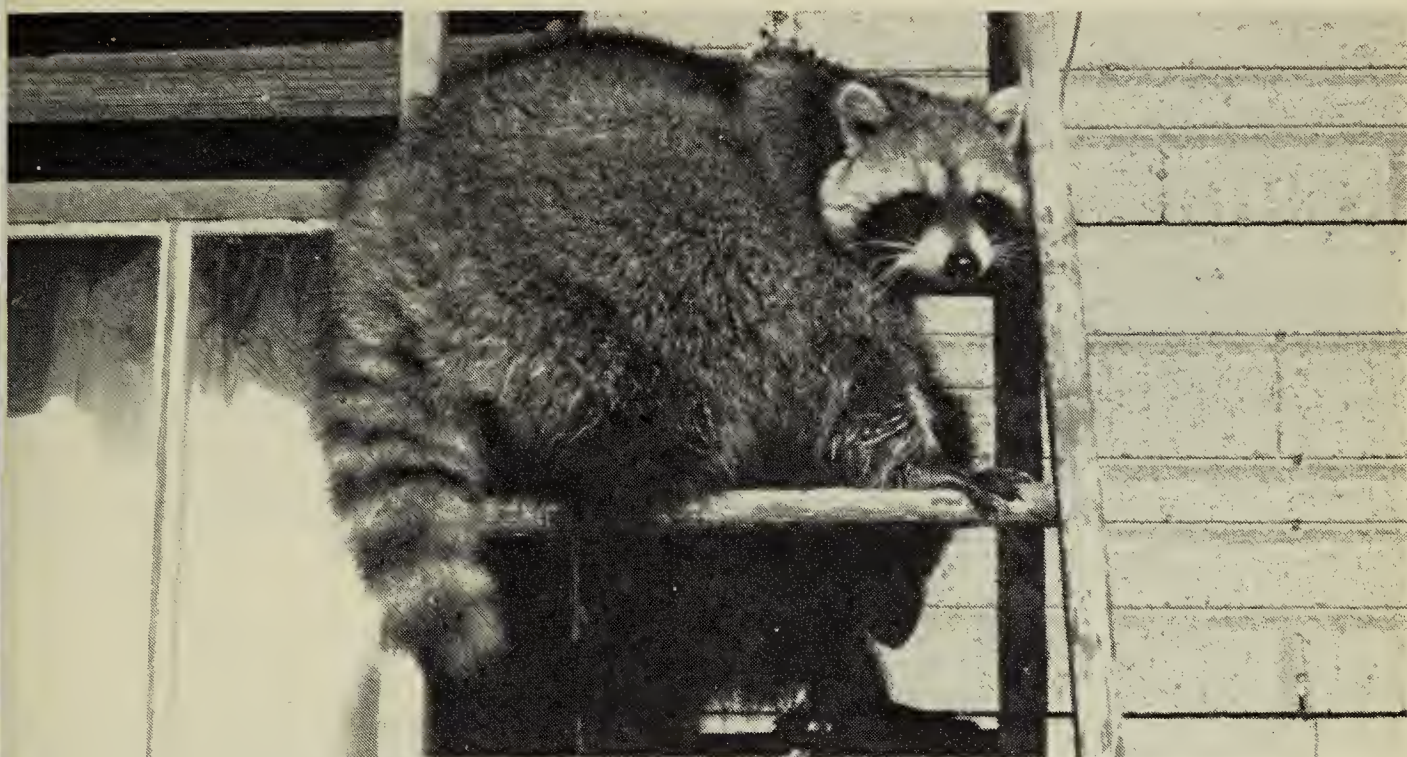
Lorne and I were determined from the first not to keep her once she no longer needed us. We had read that raccoons make the switch from captivity to their normal wild life easily and successfully, and we felt that by mid-August it was time to move her out onto the porch and to introduce her to her natural environment. So every evening I took her for walks around the farm, exploring old trees, looking under rocks, pulling down rose bushes to eat the hips, "fishing" for snails and water grubs in the sloughs, and always ending up at our big dugout. At dusk we would meet other animals there—a family of Great Horned Owls and a doe and her twin fawns came regularly, and we would usually listen to a serenade of coyotes before going back to the house. I loved those evening expeditions as much as Cass, and was fascinated watching her wading into the water to feed. While her "hands" were busy stirring up the water and feeding



*Cass fishing for snails in the dugout*

Gary W. Seib





*Helping with the storm windows*

*Lorne Scott*

herself, she never seemed to watch what she was doing, but kept a watchful eye out for danger.

In mid-September, Cass decided to take up residence in our barn, and became nocturnal. I took food and water out to her, but would only see her in the evening when she was feeding, "dunking" her food piece by piece, if water was handy. One night we found that a skunk had also moved into the barn under hay bales, and Cass compromised by moving up to the loft. Soon we saw less and less of her, as her instinctive natural habits began to replace her dependence upon her human friends. By mid-October, she was ready for winter—she now weighed 20 lbs. and had acquired a beautiful thick coat. The last time she came to the house during the day was on October 23 when she attempted to help Lorne put on storm windows and fell off the ladder when I looked out the window and startled her. A few minutes later, she looked beseechingly to Lorne for help when she fell through the thin ice on the water trough. At Christmas, we took her a special Christmas dinner, but she had changed—she simply took a

piece of food and disappeared with it, and when I tried again to see her in February she was shy and growled at me. The last time we saw her was on March 12 when Lorne watched her walking along the ridge of the barn. I went out and called her, but she was listening to a stronger natural urge and left us.

When Cass left, I felt that I had lost a real friend, and in my memory recalled all her amusing habits. I could see her covering her face with her "hands" and peeking through her fingers when she sensed trouble, or just conveniently disappearing under the couch if she knew that she was the cause of it! I thought of all the times that I had found lost articles among her "treasures" hidden in an old suitcase under a bed. I thought of her falling asleep in my lap in the evening watching TV, and realized I had lost a great companion. But we were glad that she had answered the call of the wild, and when fall came again and Lorne found that we had two raccoons wintering under a granary, we wondered whether Cass might be one of them.