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# NOTES AND LETTERS

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## VIOLET-GREEN SWALLOWS ON THE RED DEER RIVER, ALBERTA

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In 1997, 1998 and 1999, on or about 1 June, I took a canoe trip down the Red Deer River from Drumheller through the badlands to Dinosaur Provincial Park near Brooks, Alberta. Each time I saw Barn, Tree, Cliff, Bank and Violet-green Swallows. Having grown up in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the Violet-green Swallow was a new species for me. On one occasion, we counted 10 or 12 of them together.

As mentioned in Houston's article (*Blue Jay* 56:116-117, June 1999), these swallows return to specific places on the river cliffs, high on sandstone and brown dirt faces. Houston has described their range extension eastward, from the Rockies to western Saskatchewan. Presumably the populations on the Red Deer and South Saskatchewan rivers acted as 'stepping stones' for their spread?



For butterflies that overwinter as adults, you may wish to try placing hibernation cells about. These could be coffee cans in the crook of a tree, half full of dry leaves and bark; empty birdhouses; or anything that successfully mimics a hollow tree with an inviting orifice and protective thermal insulation.

Taking down a description (of an unknown butterfly) is a better use of field time than flipping through pictures in a field guide while the butterfly flies away.

# FIFTY YEARS AGO

Excerpts from *Blue Jay* Volume 7, No. 3, September 1949

Selected by Mary I. Houston

## **Lloyd T. Carmichael, editor:**

Someone has said "Curiosity, most active during infancy and adolescence, customarily repressed in most of us, is irrepressible in idiots, gossips and scientists." By no stretch of the imagination can we classify BLUE JAY subscribers as either idiots or gossips; therefore they must fall under the classification of scientists. That is correct. Naturalists are scientists; they are curious about everything around them; they are never satisfied; no sooner is one question answered than they turn their attention to new interests. Theirs is the spirit of discovery; the mental force which drives them to increasing observation and investigation.

But a truescientist, and therefore an enthusiastic naturalist, is endowed with another commendable trait – he writes down his observations so that others might benefit by his experience and feel something of the thrill that was his at the time of discovery. That is our whole point. So many of you see so many interesting things in Nature, and then fail to tell the rest of us about them. Issue after issue, the same faithful few, whose names long ago have become familiar to you, do their part, and more.

We are very sorry to learn that one of our faithful contributors, Stuart Houston, has been laid up with a crippled knee this summer. After five weeks of discomfort an operation was performed in Winnipeg, August 13. Stuart writes that he is making a good recovery and hopes to be about on crutches before the end of August.

## **Arthur Ward, Burnham**

I have an arbour in the garden, glassed all round. ... A Virginia Creeper grows thickly around, covering the glass. A Yellow Warbler built its nest six inches from the glass, in the creeper, enabling me to watch every movement. A cowbird added its egg to the first warbler eggs. I took out the cowbird egg and next morning there were two warbler eggs. By noon one of these was missing and next morning, expecting two warbler eggs, there was just one cowbird egg. It would

seem that the cowbird had ejected the warbler eggs. I now disposed of the cowbird and its egg, hoping that the warbler would commence to lay again – which it did after two days. The first was laid June 21st and the fourth three days later. On July 4th the last one was hatched, just thirteen days after the last one was laid. ...

Both parents carried food, consisting of grasshoppers, one to each bird. If it was extra large they would first push it down the throats of three, as if to soften it up, then finally give it to the fourth. ... The most the young were fed was seven times in ten minutes. ... On the second day they could take a full-sized cutworm moth with legs and wings.

## **Merle Wershler, Yorkton**

Merle, a member of the Simpson Public School Nature Club at Yorkton [led by teacher Pauline Summers] ... on August 23 saw a Blue Jay swoop down to the lawn where a [Yellow-shafted] Flicker was feeding. The Blue Jay struck the flicker in the breast, knocked the victim over, and flew away with him.

## **Lawrence Beckie, Bladworth**

On July 22 ... while hauling gravel ... I discovered a colony of Bank Swallows, nesting in the walls of the pit ... dug in the south side of a large hill ... on the east bank of Arm River. The holes are oblong, being about one and a half inches deep and two inches wide ... from a few inches to three feet from the top. ... All are not occupied. I counted twelve birds flying. ... To me it was a new discovery.

## **Snakes**

One of the largest Bull Snakes to be caught in Saskatchewan was brought to the Provincial Museum this spring by G.A. Carnie of Regina. ... Caught ... at Estevan. It is 72 inches long and weighed 3 pounds, 7 ounces. On July 14 last [1948], Albert Swanston, of the museum staff, caught a snake about twelve miles west of Gibbs. ... a Garter Snake, 37 and a half inches in length ... when it was being prepared for mounting, 44 young were removed from its body.