

VIGILANCE NEEDED IN THE GRASSLANDS

The signing of a federal-provincial agreement in the summer of 1981 brought into being the National Grasslands Park for which the Saskatchewan Natural History Society had campaigned for years. The suggestion for such a park was first made in 1957 to Winston Mair at the Society's Annual Meeting, and through the long struggle to get this idea accepted by government authorities, continuing and determined leadership was given by Dr. George F. Ledingham. It was therefore appropriate that Dr. Ledingham should receive from the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada on 8 December 1981, its J. B. HARKIN MEDAL which is awarded to persons who have served with distinction the parks and associated conservation areas of this country. In presenting the medal to Dr. Ledingham, Robert C. Scace of the National and Provincial Parks Association read the following citation:

FOR INSPIRING IN GENERATIONS OF CITIZENS KNOWLEDGE AND LOVE OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF CANADA'S GREAT PLAINS, AND DEDICATING HIMSELF AS RESEARCHER, TEACHER, WRITER AND FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE SASKATCHEWAN NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY TO THE CONSERVATION OF NATIVE GRASSLANDS IN THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES.

Mr. Scace described George Ledingham as "an individual who would most surely agree with that great landscape painter, John Constable, that 'we see nothing 'till we understand it', and who, having achieved that understanding, would selflessly pass it on to so many others by word and deed."

In his speech of acceptance, Dr. Ledingham emphasized two thoughts that seemed of primary importance to

him. First was the idea that team work, in this as in all conservation causes, has to be credited for whatever successes are obtained, since one person alone can accomplish little. Second was the reminder that we cannot relax our efforts as conservationists since vigilance alone can guarantee the preservation of the grassland ecological system. *The Blue Jay* has been given the privilege of reprinting excerpts from Dr. Ledingham's acceptance speech.

"The signings in Regina, Glentworth and Val Marie on June 19, 1981, which guarantee the establishment of a Grasslands Park in the Killdeer-Val Marie area, are important," said Dr. Ledingham, "because they will change first priorities in the area from economic interests to preservation. This park is also unique because it has been obtained by a process of participatory democracy. It was proposed by the public in 1963, and during public hearings in 1976 a good majority of briefs gave reasons for the establishment of the park which was finally agreed to by federal and provincial governments at the June 19 signings. *However, implementation and development in the park will likely be a long slow process and we must all continue to work to insure that the intent of the agreement is respected . . .*

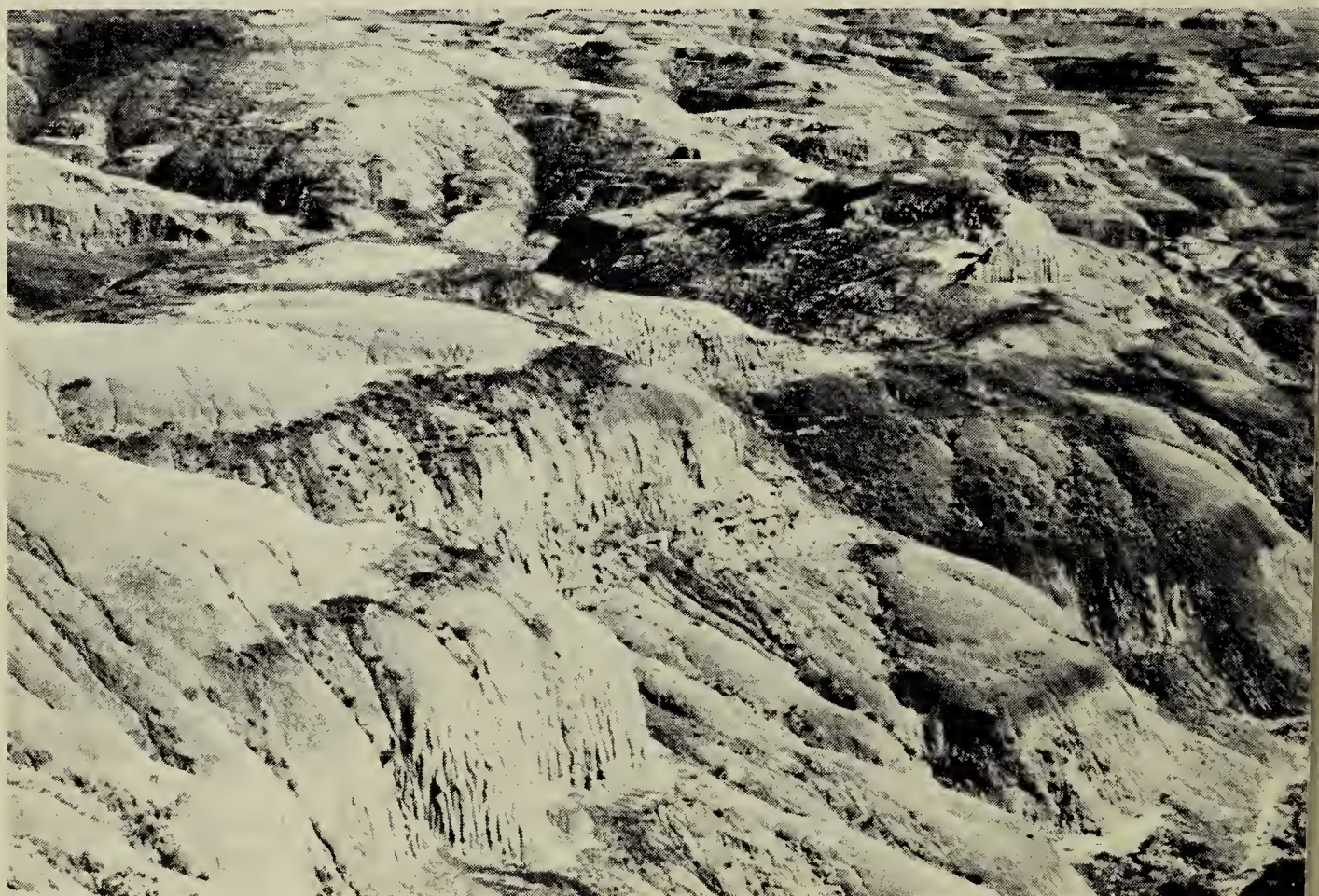
"Now six months after the official signing which creates the national park, we are frustrated. First there is a big scheme, costing millions of dollars, which will search every possible corner of the park for oil or gas even though the chances of finding any are slim. The fragile grasslands will be marked by exploration or drilling tracks for many years. Rare plants or animals may be further decimated because there has been no detailed inventory of the area

so no way of marking or guarding the most precious spots. The amount of damage and erosion caused by machines in such a search is completely unpredictable, and the search is in itself a violation against the preservation concept of this and all national parks.

"There are many other worries, such as those felt by ranchers in the area. Can they now sell to the Federal Government or will their leases expire? Will agriculture be allowed to persuade some ranchers in the area to break native grasslands and so make the land useless for national park purposes? All pro-park supporters are worried because the future of the area looks uncertain, and there is no guarantee that the grassland ecological system that the park has been established to preserve

will not be destroyed.

"We are increasingly aware that man's future depends on the survival of nature, and it is surely our responsibility in Saskatchewan to preserve some of our natural heritage. Naturalists are now better organized and people generally are better informed. We must depend on their informed attitudes and concern to insist on the carrying out of the intent of the agreement which has been signed. We must hold ourselves responsible for making our governments respect this park agreement and its intent which is to preserve native grasslands and all associated native plants and animals." — Prepared by *Margaret Belcher*, 2601 Winnipeg St., Regina, Saskatchewan. S4P 1H8



Badlands in the Killdeer area

Gary W. Sei