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# LETTERS

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## ROBINS AND HUMANS

Seven years ago my husband and I decided to abandon the perils of city life and move into an environment we both loved, the boreal forest of northern Saskatchewan. We built a well insulated, well sealed log house about 32 km north of Otter Lake. When we started to build, the site was a tangle of overgrown black spruce. Our first garden was almost comical.

As the years have passed we have become keen observers of the wildlife around our house, particularly the birds, and especially the migrant birds which indicate the passing of the seasons. The dead wood and brush around the house have gradually found their way into the stove and heater. The area around the house which was once quite a jungle is now open, and our productive garden covers about an acre.

In 1980 with the spring bird arrivals we noticed a pair of American Robins

for the first time. They stayed around the house for a few days before moving on to more suitable nesting habitat. In 1981 we noticed another, or perhaps the same pair, but they likewise moved on. In 1982, however, a pair of robins stayed near the house to nest. They delighted the whole family with their orange breasts and beautiful voices. We look forward next spring to one beneficial result of the minor habitat modification we have caused — we expect to have the robins return.

Robins are not rare in local birch-poplar stands in summer. However, they are secretive and wary compared to the robins around the house and garden.

We carefully conserve mineral and organic nutrients. This is a matter of aesthetics as well as economics; we produce about half of our food from land which was naturally very nutrient deficient. As a result we do not expect our presence to lead to colonization by birds which are associated with discarded food such as House Sparrows and



*Robins*

*Hans Dommasch*

Starlings. On the other hand, Barn Swallows have been by to investigate our house for potential nest sites. We also built eight nest boxes mounted on poles inaccessible to Red Squirrels. The nest boxes have been used by mosquito eating Tree Swallows. — *Ann Jeffries*, Box 1409, La Ronge, Saskatchewan. S0J 1L0

**(Editor's Note.** Ann's husband, Clark, is a mathematician and consultant. He manufactures a type of wind turbine and alternator available in kit form. Ann formerly worked for the Canadian Nature Federation office in Ottawa. The canoe trip to their house includes nine portages. They power their lights, washing machine, stereo, radios, telephone, typewriter, lathe, table saw, welder, hand power tools, and vacuum cleaner with wind generated electricity. Their two daughters obtain their education by means of a correspondence course.)

## BIRDS AND WEATHER 1982

I would like to relate of birds and the May 28 storm. A mother wren died here and at the neighbors a wren, also a nest of young robins.

This fall during snow and cloudy weather a nest of barn swallows was deserted. I saw one after it fell to the ground — I brought it in but it died minutes later. The two remaining ones flew a short distance and returned to the power line near the house. I went out and dug earth worms and threw them up past their "noses" so to speak, but they made no attempt to catch any. They disappeared shortly after, I presumed to go back to their nest. I investigated but the nest was at the peak of the garage and I couldn't reach it. It remained cool and cloudy for a week afterwards — certainly no evidence of insects flying. — *Hertha McCorrison*, R.R. 1, Site 2, Box 12, Ridgedale, Saskatchewan. S0E 1L0

## BOTANIZING FROM AFAR

I watch all nature programs on color television, which I always find interesting and highly educational. A short time ago, I viewed a film by Marlon Perkins of "Wild Kingdom", showing from a helicopter the capture and tagging of moose calves in the Cumberland Delta area of northeast Saskatchewan. The purpose of this study, conducted by Saskatchewan Wild Life Biologists, is to determine the cause of high mortality of moose calves during the first summer, and I shall be interested in the results of this study when it is available.

This film, like many others, had an added interest for me. As a botanist, I was able to determine from the low-flying helicopter, with its excellent color photography, the following plant species present: Black Spruce (*Picea mariana*), Tamarack (*Larix laricina*), Cattail (*Typha latifolia*), Bulrush (*Scirpus validus*), Reed Grass (*Phragmites australis*), Alaska Birch (*Betula neoalaskana*), Saskatoon in flower (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), and an abundance of a tussock sedge, (probably *Carex aquatilis*). — *August J. Breitung*, 4213 Los Coyotes Diagonal, Lakewood, California. 90713

**(Editor's Note:** Mr. Breitung is a former resident of McKague, Saskatchewan and probably best known for his 1957 publication entitled *Annotated Catalogue of the Vascular Flora of Saskatchewan* published in the *American Midland Naturalist*.)

## WHITE-TAILED PTARMIGAN

I thought *Blue Jay* readers might like to know that the photographs of the White-tailed Ptarmigan in the last issue were of a male in mid summer on the left; the bird on the upper right was an immature photographed in September. — *G. L. Holroyd*, Box 1343, Banff, Alberta. T0L 0C0

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*Merlin*

*Sheina Wait*