
JUNIOR NATURALISTS

OWL BANDING

On 24 May 1981 I was able to go Great Horned Owl banding with Dr. C. Stuart Houston and his helpers, Shaun, Nigel, and Kim. I, thanks to the help of Mr. Peter Boychuk (our Science teacher), organized this year's Crystal Springs owl banding trip; it was our best year ever. Dixon Lake School's Grade 5 and 6 students found these nests: Kent Olchowy - nest with 3 young; Kirk Dunlop - nest with 2 young; Joanne Perillat - nest with 2 young; Donna LaRoche - nest with 2 young and an egg; John Alexanderson - nest with 2 young; Trevor Lysitza - nest with 3 young; and Rolf Krohn - nest with 3 young. Mr. Boychuk also found a nest with 3 young for a total of 18 young owls. I had fun and hope to go again in following years. For those who have never found an owl nest or have never seen banding done, go looking for I'm sure you'll find it as fun and rewarding as I did. — *Judy MacLeod*, (Grade 6, age 11), Dixon Lake School, Crystal Springs, Saskatchewan. S0K 1A0



Young Great Horned Owls in nest box.
G. W. Seib

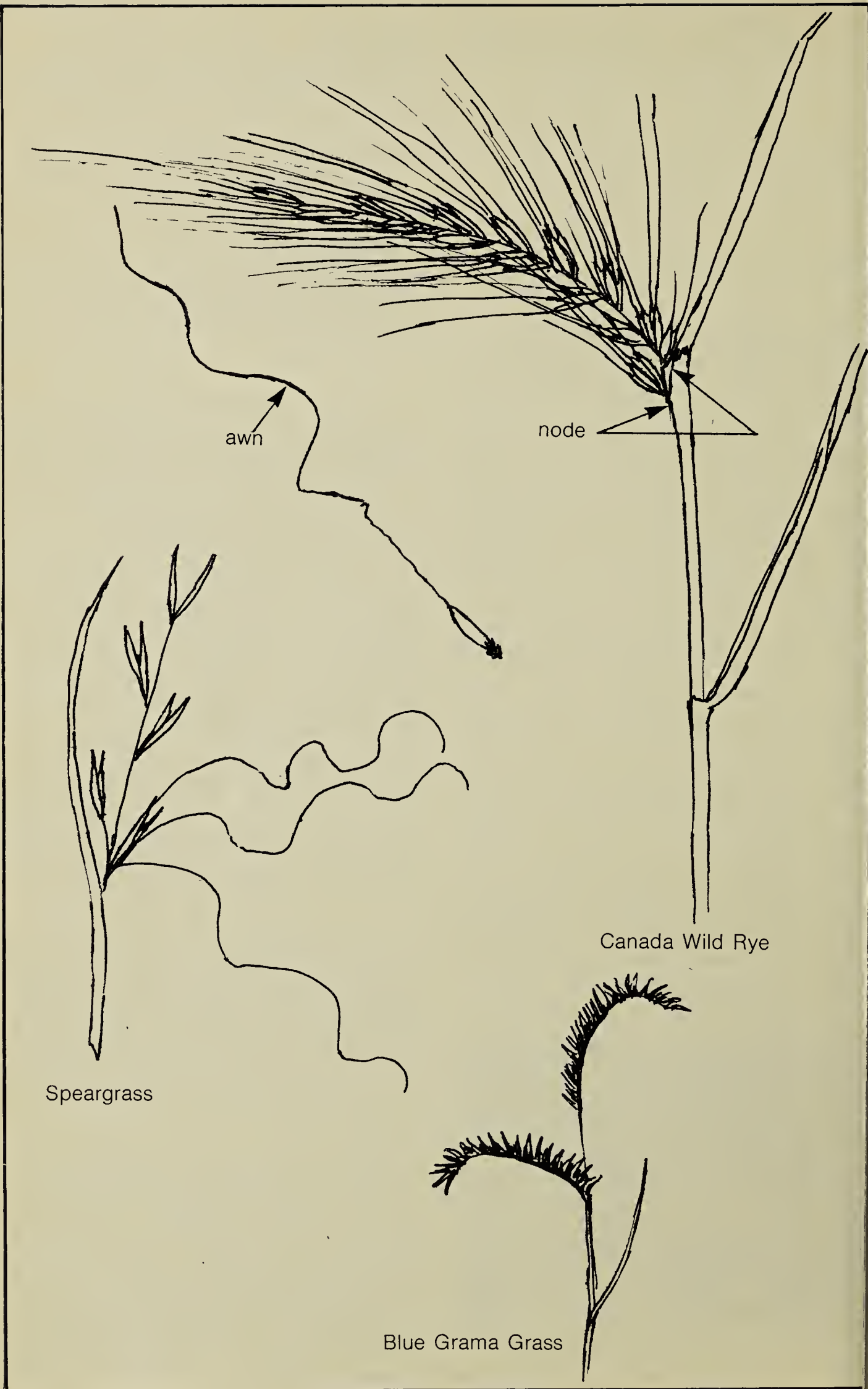
COMMON SASKATCHEWAN GRASSES

In this issue of the *Blue Jay* we have something important to celebrate: the Federal and Provincial Governments have finally signed the agreement to establish a National Grasslands Park in southwestern Saskatchewan.

I thought that we could celebrate our own way, by learning some of the grasses of Saskatchewan. I chose three favorites, all fairly easy to identify. You can look for these and lots of others, for Saskatchewan has more than 100 different grasses! Compare the shapes of their heads, size, color, etc. You can even draw them, as I did! Do the seeds attach to animal fur, like speargrass? How do you think they disperse? On the practical side, they make a nice addition to dry flower arrangements.

You will have the best chance of finding these grasses on areas of native prairie. Even in intensively cultivated areas some bits of prairie usually remain in cattle pastures, slough edges or along the railway tracks. The seed heads are recognizable so you can look for these grasses all fall.

Notes from juniors are welcome. I hope to get some suggestions for this column which I hope to prepare for each *Blue Jay*, and comments, too . . . grasses certainly are a good subject for the photo contest announced in the May newsletter — *Paule B. Hjertaas*, 919 Cook Crescent, Regina, Saskatchewan. S4X 2L9



awn

node

Speargrass

Canada Wild Rye

Blue Grama Grass

SPEARGRASS or NEEDLEGRASS

Stipa comata

Very common in native prairie and even in such disturbed areas as gravel pits. Like the name indicates, the seeds (Figure 1) are shaped like spears: a pointed head and a long straight shaft. It digs into your clothes and is kept in place by the stiff hair near the tip. The "tail" or awn of the seed coils as it dries. If it only bends, the plant you are looking at might be the rarer Porcupine Grass, *Stipa spartea*.

CANADA or NODDING WILD RYE

Elymus canadensis

Lots of leaves at the base and useful as a soil binder, thus preventing erosion. Easy to find as it grows along roads and riverbanks, as well as in sandy soil. It has long awns and two or three small spikes (flower clusters with flowers directly attached to the stalk) attached together at every node.

BLUE GRAMA GRASS

Bouteloua gracilis

With its unmistakable sickle shape, it comes to us from the south and is most abundant in short-grass prairie. That is why it is found on dryer south-facing slopes of valleys and not on the north-facing ones. It can grow to 16 inches tall and is resistant to grazing (and, I suppose, mowing too) and trampling. Maybe I could replace a little piece of my lawn with it . . .

EDITOR'S NOTE: A good book which should be in most school libraries and be of help to students in identifying grasses (and other plants, too) is *Budd's Flora* by J. Looman and K. Best or the older version of this book called *Wild Plants of the Canadian Prairies* by A. C. Budd, both published by the Canada Dept. of Agriculture. Both books use very little technical language and are relatively easy to use and contain some illustrations of plants.



Grasslands National Park near Val Marie.

Gary W. Seib