
LETTERS

A TASTE FOR FOWL

On going out to do the chores the morning of 11 January, 1985 I found one of our domestic geese minus its head and neck. I first thought that it had died and that the dogs had been eating it but the racket of several magpies prompted me to look about. On a pine tree behind the grain bins a Great Horned Owl was roosting. With binoculars I observed blood on its breast feathers and a white downy feather stuck near one eye. I assumed it was the culprit.

For the next three days the owl perched on a tree near the barn or chicken house and was observed feeding on the goose carcass even in daylight. We locked the geese in the barn at night.

On 15 January our dogs stole the remains of the goose and the owl was not seen for a few days. The geese were going into the barn at night on their own and we stopped shutting the door.

While it was still dark the morning of the 18th I went out to do the chores. The owl flew out of the barn. I found a second dead goose with head and neck missing. After that we shut the geese in every night. The owl roosted on trees around the yard each day but never bothered geese or chickens outside during the day. We heard it hooting the night of the 21st.

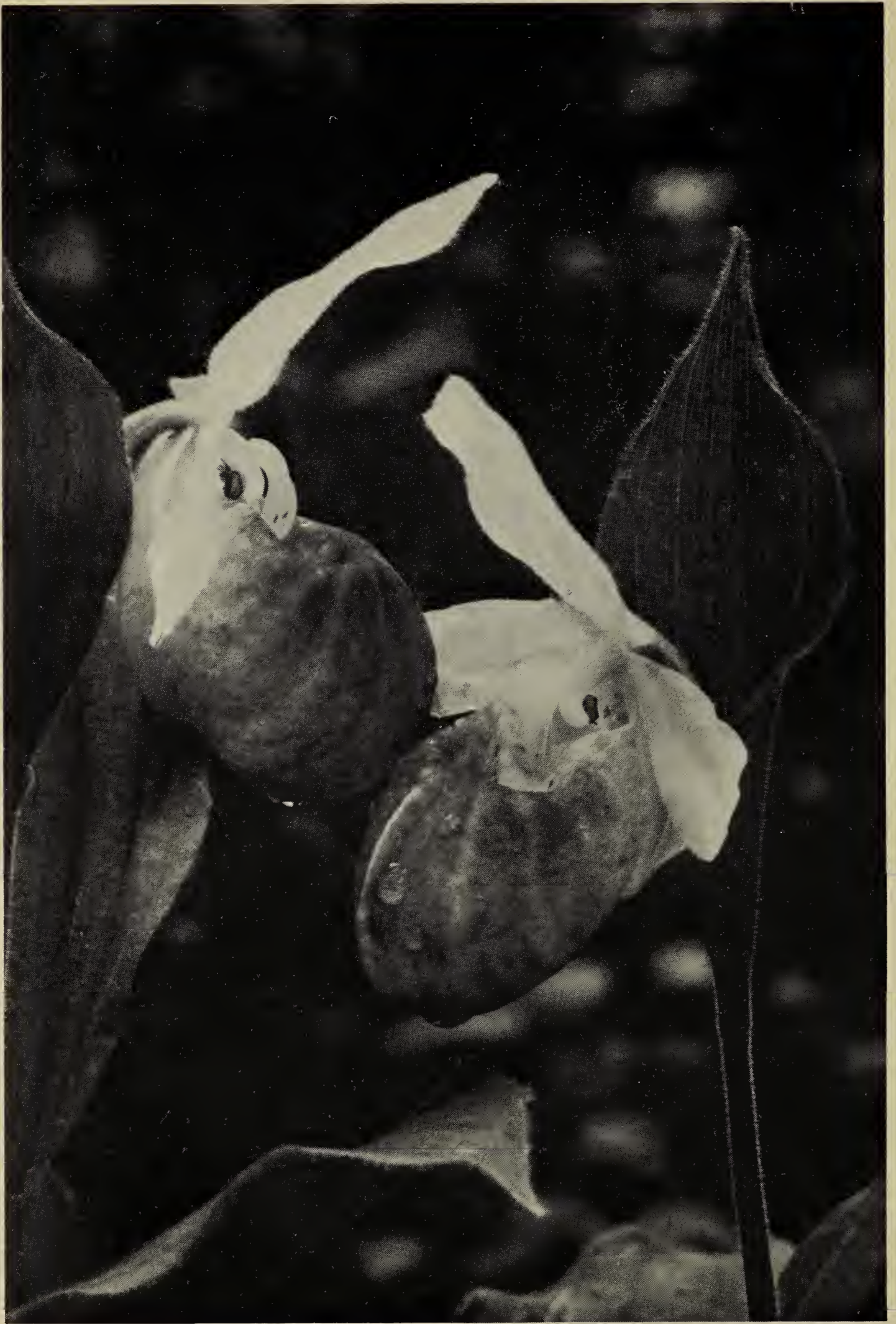
On January 23 we found a 24" square window on the chicken house broken in, wing marks on the snow outside, and two chickens with no heads or necks. Our Great Horned Owl was sitting in a tree near the chicken house. Regretfully we decided three strikes was enough and shot the owl.
— *Joan Dalziel*, Box 1, Love, Saskatchewan.
S0J 1P0

SHOWY LADY'S SLIPPERS — 1943

My brother and I had been cutting cordwood in the swamp during the 1930's; I wanted to know what the low place in the swamp was like in the summer. The last Saturday in June 1943 I went. When about 500 feet from the low spot I could see whitish. Ice? Couldn't be! Water, maybe. Coming quite close I recognized it as flowers. WOW! But there were so many, in the thousands; 200 feet ahead, about that much to the right and to the left. Two acres or more a solid mass of white — more than two hay racks full. I could not believe what I was seeing; was not dreaming for I was in the swamp. I plucked some and hurried home.

At home I told my two sisters to go to see something they had never seen before. We have seen both the small and large Yellow Lady's-slipper but not the Showy as they grow in the swamp or bog. Reasons for not going to the swamp in summer are many: humidity very high, hard to walk, mosquitoes, and many flies of about half a dozen species.

On Sunday my sisters arrived with enough plants to fill a galvanized tub. Two lady school teachers who were driving around the district bidding farewell to the families stopped and stayed for a half hour admiring the beautiful flowers. They thought that they were all pulled out, but not so for there was the two acres left for no one to see. No wonder the name "Showy." — *Lewis Wojciechowski*, R.R. 1, Lac Du Bonnet, Manitoba. R0E 1A0



Showy Lady's-slipper

Lawrence Baschak

NATURE NOTES FROM SOUTHEY

I am a long time subscriber of the *Blue Jay* and have, in years gone by, sent in some nature news to the magazine.

This spring I have had the pleasure of observing several unusual occurrences on our old homestead now farmed by our son. This farm is situated not far from Raymore, south on No. 6 Highway about 18 miles, then 2 miles east on the grid road and south about a mile. No one is there now except for farm operations during the farming season, so it is quiet and fairly secluded with a good windbreak surrounding the yard.

On the Easter weekend some of our family paid a visit to the farm and were greeted by an excited pair of Merlins which had evidently set up housekeeping in an old magpie's nest. I had just previously had the good fortune to see a pair of Merlins on the 20 block Lorne Street in Regina, my first sighting of this bird. Having heard and read how scarce they are, you can imagine my surprise to find them at our farm where I had lived for over thirty years without seeing one in all that time. Surprisingly, there is also a pair of magpies nesting within a few yards of the Merlin's nest and a pair of crows appear to have a nest farther along. All these nests are high up in spruce trees and, therefore, rather difficult to observe. We hope the Merlins are able to hold their own against the crows and magpies.

On a subsequent visit to the farm on May 28th, I was in for another surprise. When I was trying to get a good look at the Merlins, a fairly large bird flew from high up in another spruce tree on the other side of the windbreak. It looked like a Mallard duck. Sure enough, there was a nest high up amongst the evergreen boughs, perhaps

an old crow's nest. I have since verified that it is, indeed, a Mallard duck nesting up there. About twenty years ago, I found a pintail duck nesting in an abandoned crow's nest in a willow tree on the edge of a slough not far from this same site. She nested there for a couple of years, and raised one clutch of ducklings, but crows found the nest and eggs the second year.

A few days ago [letter 5 May 1985], I was again out at the farm and wandering through the windbreak away from these nesting birds; I was again startled when a bird flew from a low evergreen branch quite close to me and settled on a poplar branch a few yards ahead of me in the bluff. Fortunately, I had my field glasses with me and was able to identify it as a screech owl, another first for my list of birds over the years.

For several springs now, a pair of robins have set up housekeeping on the seat of a tractor sitting out in the yard at the farm. They are back again this spring. What to do when the men need the tractor? The nest has been moved to the top of a barrel close by the tractor and protected by plywood and the robin has continued to nest. I believe magpies found the nest last year. We are faced again with having to move the nest so that the tractor can be used!

So much for these very interesting birds and their habits!

Last fall the S.N.H.S. sent a letter out regarding the Burrowing Owl and I have this to report rather belatedly. Perhaps about twenty years ago there were Burrowing Owls on the SW33-23-17W2nd. Since then it has been excavated for gravel for the municipality and ruined for the Burrowing Owls. I have never seen any in recent years. — *Gertrude B. Hillier*, Box 351, Southey, Saskatchewan. S0G 4P0