

FUR NOT FEATHERS.

Francis Roy, Tullis, wrote us recently - "Do you know there has only been one mention of beavers in the "Blue Jay"? Are there any dams near Yorkton? There is a large colony located about ten miles from home in a big coulee. A considerable number of beavers have been taken from this colony, from time to time, to re-populate other districts but their number must still be in the vicinity of 200 or more. This summer I made a very interesting discovery and this was, that there are several large, very dark mink in the same coulee. Possibly they prey upon the young beavers"(Beavers have re-established themselves at one place west of Yorkton within the last few years but the exact location of this colony is being kept a "security" secret.-Editor)

A black "gopher" (Richardson's Ground Squirrel) was caught by Frank Baines, Saltcoats, the end of July and forwarded to the Provincial Museum. The back of the animal was a rich glossy black and the rest of the body darkly grizzled.

DO YOU KNOW?

No. 2. Prairie Dogs. Prairie Dogs are one of several interesting and curious animals which, in Saskatchewan, are found only in the extreme southwest corner of the province - types which belong to the arid semi-desert plains of the western States.

Despite their name, Prairie Dogs have no canine connection. They are rodents and close relatives of the Ground Squirrels and the Woodchuck. In fact they look very much like the common "gopher" but are about two thirds bigger, and are decidedly plump and stocky. They are sociable in habit and live in large colonies known as "towns." Such colonies often cover several acres and one of the most extensive Saskatchewan "dog towns" is situated some 15 miles south of Val Marie on a flat bottom surrounded by high bare hills which sparkle in the sunshine from the low grade mica contained in the rocks.

Prairie Dogs sit erect on their haunches as do the Ground Squirrels, and when a town is first seen from a distance, the ground appears to be studded with dozens of small stakes. As a stranger comes nearer, the "dogs" lie down on the top of their burrows and utter a gruff bark. They are extremely wary and it is almost impossible to get closer than 50 yards; after that, they simply disappear one by one down their holes.

They pile up large, cone-shaped mounds with an entrance at the centre, on the top. The entrance tunnel is about six to seven inches in diameter and extends straight down into the ground for several feet. (One which went down vertically for 14 feet before branching off has been recorded). For this reason it is extremely difficult to obtain a specimen of a "dog" with a rifle, for, if hit, they simply fall back down the hole, unless the impact of the bullet carries the animal beyond the opening.

The old tale of the Prairie Dog, Burrowing Owl and Rattle snake all living together as one happy family, has been disproved. A deserted burrow may serve as a nesting site for the Burrowing Owl, and the Rattler may shelter in one when he visits a colony in search of food, but this seems as far as the association goes. Chief enemies of the Prairie Dogs are the Badger and the rare Black-footed Ferret - the latter is the most ferocious of all the weasels and is another of the animals peculiar to the southwest section of the province.

-From notes supplied by J.H. Wilson.