

BIRDS

Correction:

In our last issue Mr. Ward was reported as having banded 26 Cowbirds. It should have read "26 Catbirds." Mr. Ward remarks, "A noose around a Cowbird's neck would be more befitting than a band on its leg."

THE PLEASURES OF THE YEAR

Elizabeth Cruickshank,
Regina

(Editor's note: The following article is one which thrilled me as it cannot help but thrill our readers who find so much pleasure in the study of Nature. Mrs. Cruickshank has the ability, not only to see and find pleasure in those things which many of us would pass by unnoticed, but to express the thoughts which they awaken in her in a poetic and pleasing style. She and her little dog and the wide open spaces open our eyes to the fact that "Nature should be a personal adventure in discovering a living world, for in that fashion is best kindled an awareness of the vast storehouse of the priceless treasure that surrounds us and an intense eagerness to find out more about these treasures.")

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With winter just around the corner we can enjoy in retrospect the pleasures of the year.

If you really want to enjoy spring on the prairie, miss one. I know. For me the spring of '48 was all second-hand; but not the spring of '49.

Early in May found me in our beloved country - the Valley. There on a high hill with Craven flats before us - an exuberant crowd of geese and swans splashing in a narrow strip of fresh water to the north - there in a sheltered sun-drenched depression were Crocuses in profusion - a carpet of Moss Phlox - Prairie Onions and Blue Violets raising their heads to the blue sky above - Pussy Willows beyond them.

I knew then - I felt as Tennant felt;

"Hungry for spring I bent my head
The perfume fanned my face
And all my soul went dancing
In that little lovely place."

Water attracts more birds than food, I sometimes think. But food makes for repeat visits. Last winter a few Bohemian Waxwings stopped in our yard to bathe in the rubber tire bath. I put out some chopped dried fruit mixed with oatmeal and suet. A dozen Bohemians were soon busy eating. Every day for three weeks more and more came to dine and splash. I shall never forget the sight of them on the snow, nor the soft trilling song of contentment that followed as they sunned themselves in the trees. I had hoped for a return visit but none came.

As if to make up for the failure of their wandering relations putting in an appearance, a pair of Cedar Waxwings nested in our hedge. It was interesting to watch them all summer long. We thought they would go before the first cold spell - but they seemed loath to leave. But one warm day we were surprised to hear excited splashing. From the open kitchen window we watched the seven Waxwings, flitting in and out of the water - sunning themselves in the honeysuckle, then going back for another splash. All the while the English Sparrows tried over and over again to join the Waxwings in their bathing orgy. They weren't allowed near. Then to our amazement, with all seven busy enjoying the last little bit of water that was left - in walked a wee Ruby-crowned Kinglet,

alone, No objection was raised to this newcomer participating in this last ritual. All splashed in glee until the sun left the spot; then the eight rose as one and disappeared. We felt like shouting to them to return next spring. The yard looked so dead when they had gone, but the joy of their presence will remain with us.

Robins are always a pleasure even though their evensong holds a bit of heartache. One special thrill of this year, though, was their farewell. We had not seen any for many days. Daily walks on the prairie with my dog help me to keep in touch with the arrival and departure of our feathered friends. Then one cold day we had the Gyro golf course to ourselves. Suddenly, Fogarty had his leash snapped on, for before us, as we turned homeward, I saw more robins than I had ever seen. I counted forty-six on the dried creek bed. I'm sure there were more. That is one picture that "will flash upon the inward eye" many, many times. How bare the spot looked next day.

We watched with great interest a pair of Upland Plovers build their nest on the prairie. Every day we saw the mother bird stay on the job. We were anxious to see how the young would leave the nest. Then suddenly the nest was deserted. Investigation disclosed a hole directly under the nest - one egg and some shells were all that remained. Had gophers tunnelled up from beneath to steal the eggs or the young? We shall always wonder. It was pleasure - perhaps drama - then certainly tragedy.

As we conjure up the rare beauty that was ours to share this year; as we think of the knowledge gained; as we check flower specimens found by us for the first time, and impress on our minds the distinguishing marks of birds we were confused about, we know we do not need to go abroad for happiness - nor to seek afar for beauty.

Tramping through this winter's snow we shall find delight in remembering that day last July at the Beach when we took a shortcut to find breathtaking loveliness in an unexpected bed of bluebells - hundreds of them.

Seeing road machinery will remind us of our haste last summer to check and learn if the new road at the Lake had cut through the only place where every spring we hurry to find the Shin Leaf. Imagine our thrill to find that not only was the delicate little Wintergreen safe and more beautiful than ever, but also to find the Dwarf Cornel where we had never seen it before, keeping it company.



Dwarf Cornel



Jewel Weed

We missed the bloom of the Umbrella Plant but compensating us for it was the Umbrella-wort, which was new to us. All last winter we had looked forward to visiting the sheltered spot by a spring where we had first found the Jewel Weed, to find it had been a cattle shelter, piled high with trampled straw. Our delight knew no bounds when we learned that another bed of the beautiful Touch-me-not was thriving nearer the spring's source.

So many joys have come to me in '49, but my record would be incomplete without mentioning one of the highlights. Mr. A. C. Budd spent an evening with us. His botanical lore, coloured flower film, experiences and adventures collecting flower specimens; discussion of his flower key - the modest mention of *Ranunculus Buddii* combined to make an evening not soon to be forgotten.

With birds and flowers gone we can now anticipate many hours of pleasure in the museum. The old and the new cases, the wild-life arrangement, the herbarium, all make hours spent there fly like wings.

But our walks still hold beauty. We take more note of the character of the bare old trees - their beauty of line; the good earth rests in peace bathed in sunshine or sunset glory. Sunrise will delight as always as it makes a pattern of silver lace on our shimmering trees.

As I think of it my wee granddaughter rushes in - a snowflake caught in her mitten - "Look Gram - the star of Bethlehem" - winter is here.



CHICKADEES

Although many birds which customarily show up in the Grenfell area were, because of the hot dry summer, conspicuous by their absence, the Chickadees, Barn Swallows and Orioles were back in goodly numbers, according to a report received from Mrs. F. Bilsbury.

Among the "black-caps" several were noticed that were red-backed and Mrs. Bilsbury was puzzled as to their identity.

It would seem that the Hudsonian Chickadee, a visitor from the north, had dropped in on its cousin, asking for a share of the local bird's suet. But if this were so it would be an interesting record for the prairie so early in the season. In fact, according to Mr. Bard, of the Provincial Museum, none of these birds have before been reported as having been seen on the prairie in summer. It is quite possible that they may be the common chickadee which very often vary in color.

Among other summer visitors Mrs. Bilsbury was fortunate enough to identify a Says Phoebe, a bird which she had not seen before. A pair of Blue Herrons visited local dugouts and spent the summer in and around the district. A pair of Kingbirds returned to nest in the trees about the house for the fourth consecutive year.

"I have noticed that a pair of Bluebirds returned this fall with a brood of nine. This seems rather a large number for one pair of birds. Are there any records of their raising two broods in one season?"

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PRAIRIE CHICKENS

Chas. Leach, Regina

Mr. Leach is both pleased and amazed at the remarkable comeback of the Prairie Chicken in the Regina district.

On Thanksgiving Day, October 10, he saw at least three hundred in an area some fifteen miles north-east of the city. One large flock had congregated on the side of a hill, as if participating in one of their dances. The noise they were making could be heard distinctly over half a mile away.

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