

WILD BEES

By J.D. Ritchie

Numerous volumes have been written about bees yet still much remains to be discovered of even the most common species. In a letter from Dr. Linsley, one of the greatest authorities on bees of North America, he states, "Although we know there are thousands of species of bees in North America, very little is known about the habits of more than one hundred or so of these."

Here is a field of investigation wide open to the young naturalist, who, if he studies the wild bees, is almost certain to discover something that no one has ever previously recorded and which may be of the utmost value to a fascinating study, the science of Entomology.

There is much yet to be learned about even the common bumble-bees, those big fellows found in every field and garden in the country. The clumsy bumble-bee Bombus is everyone's friend. When we were youngsters in Ontario we imprisoned her in ink bottles and made her sing to us. She brings back memories of happy hours, long purple prickly bull-thistles, roadsides golden with dandelions and buttercups, fields of sweet-smelling clover blossoms, which without her help in cross-fertilization, would produce very little seed.

Although bees as a rule are very industrious, still there are loafers to be found in the family. The drones or males, of all bees, never so far as is known, do any work and in certain species where both sexes are alike idle they are dependent on the exertions of other species of bees. These lazy species are known as guest bees or "inquilines". These inquilines are entertained by both solitary bees and by social bees, who act willingly or unwillingly as hosts.

The genus Psithyrus is a guest-bee that infests the nests of bumble-bees. The puzzling thing about these guest-bees is that they are apparently welcome guests and so far it has not yet been proven that they are of any use whatever to the colony. They so closely resemble the bumble-bees in appearance that it is difficult to determine whether a male is a psithyrus or a bombus. Nevertheless the females are easily distinguished for through disuse they have lost the pollen basket of the hind legs. It cannot be supposed that the guests are mistaken for members of the family and some naturalists believe that these aristocratic guests are important in some way to the prosperity of the whole family, but of what importance no one has as yet the slightest hint.

There are many families of bees and remarkable differences exist among them. Most of them are solitary species. Some are miners and dig in the ground. Some are masons and make their nests of mortar-like mud which they attach to such places as stones. Some are carpenters and bore tunnels in solid and rotten wood or enlarge the tunnels of wood-boring larvae. Others excavate the pith from such places as raspberry stems, while others are leaf-cutters lining their nests with leaves or petals of flowers. I found one of these last summer in the dry dead stalk of a cow parsnip plant and perhaps you have found the cells of these in the tunnels of wood-boring larvae when splitting a block of stove wood.

If you have never studied bees before you will be amazed at their great numbers and various colors. Some of them are small iridescent living gems and visit only certain flowers. You can watch the bees any bright sunny summer day when you step out of doors. Many species abound wherever flowers grow and they have been studied from earliest times. A friend, who in the

summer of 1944 was with the Porsild Biological expeditions in the Yukon, beyond the Arctic circle, tells me that there are many species of bees even in that far northern district.

If you are interested in learning more about the life and habits of bees you should read Maeterlinck's "Life of the Bee" and "The Golden Throng" by Edwin Way Teale. Both are classic among the many volumes which have been written about these interesting creatures.

GENERAL NOTES

Mrs. F. Bilsbury, of Grenfell, in a letter dated June 26, reports: "There is not one common gopher (Richardson's ground squirrel), or grey bush gopher (Franklin's ground squirrel), or striped gopher to be seen. I have only seen one chipmunk this summer. A year ago pocket gophers were thick; now there is not one. We believe that through the heavy snow and increase in water, many of these animals either were drowned out or fled.

There has been a great increase in the number of frogs in the Grenfell district this summer, but no toads have been seen."

.....

A Devils lake Tiger Salamander was found in a Yorkton garden, August 9, 1947, by two of our junior members, Nathaniel Olson and Edward Burski.

.....

A fossilized shellfish was unearthed by Yorkton city workmen, August 18, 1947, while digging a trench on Fourth Avenue. The fossil was in an excellent state of preservation, having been encased in an ironstone concretion. The fossil is known as a baculite, one of the straight shelled cephalopods, which are represented in existing faunas by two groups, one including such animals as squids and cuttlefishes, and the octopus, the other comprising the solitary genus Nautilus. The fossil is five inches in length and one inch in diameter. It has been given by the finder, Mr. Alfred Guppy, to the city for the future Yorkton museum.

.....

It is with much regret that we report the death of Mr. John A. Gunn of Good Spirit Lake, who died at Fort Qu'Appelle Sanatorium on August 12. Born near Fort Qu'Appelle in August, 1883, he settled with his parents at Good Spirit Lake (known locally as Devil's Lake) in 1888. A veteran of both the Boer and First World Wars, he was a storekeeper and postmaster at Spirit Lake P.O. Mr. Gunn was a member of the Yorkton Natural History Society from its inception. He was a keen observer of nature and furnished the "Blue Jay" with many reports on the wildlife of his district. His passing will be deeply felt by all who knew him.

.....

Members will note that this issue of the "Blue Jay" combines both the April-May-June and the July-August-September issues. (Volume 5, Nos. 3 & 4). We sincerely regret having to follow such a policy, but we saw no other way of bringing Volume 5 to a close before the commencement of our next fiscal year. We have been one issue behind ever since Mrs. Friestly's unexpected death over one year ago, and we have finally had to give up the hopes we once entertained of catching up to date. This past year has not been an easy one for the Editors of the "Blue Jay"; however, difficulties have been overcome one by one, and we are now set for a fresh start this coming year. We trust that the fact that this issue is slightly larger than usual will help to compensate for the issue missed.

.....