

Through the Cabin Window

Collected Essays of James Howard Sedgwick

1936 — 1943





*Cover Photo: The Cabin. Above: James H. Sedgwick (1894-1976), dressed for the field c.1935
Photos courtesy of Hanson Studio archives.*

Foreword

From 1936 to early 1942—with an additional issue in early 1943—James H. Sedgwick edited and published NATURE NOTES, “The Magazine of Outdoor Information,” (which motto, delightfully, was often translated into: “The Magazine of Outdoor Inspiration” on the contents page) as a paean to his love for the beauty of nature. Most issues included an editorial column, “Through the Cabin Window,” and the following essays are, for the most part, selections from the collection of those columns,

The Cabin, the view through whose Window inspired these essays, is gone. It stood on a bluff above the Illinois River on the north side of Peoria amidst the hardwood forest environment that is typical of the non-cultivated landscape in that part of the country. I recall the Cabin mostly as a dusty treasure trove of books, butterfly collections, and fascinating naturalist's paraphernalia.

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I have often thought that my choice of careers was strongly influenced by my Grandfather Sedgwick: by concentrating my efforts on understanding our global environment rather than on being an aerospace engineer (for which I was originally trained), I feel that somehow I am following in his footsteps. As can be seen from these columns, he was a naturalist in the Victorian tradition of the generalist rather than in our current mode of extreme specialization in science. Some of that ethic has shaped me: I have no doubt that it was his broad curiosity and knowledge about all facets of the outdoors, impressed upon me while I tried to keep up with him during all those walks in the woods, that motivated me to pursue environmental sciences.

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What is perhaps most interesting to me about these various editorials is the degree to which Grandfather presents himself as what we now call an "environmentalist." Fifty years ago, environmentalism was expressed less stridently than it is now, but comparing the basic ideas in these essays with the paradigm established by Edward Abbey, a truly radical environmentalist whose *Desert Solitaire* (which originally appeared in 1968) set the stage for such advocacy groups as Greenpeace and Earth First!, is revealing indeed. They both use nature's beauty as the inspiration for their writings and express this inspiration in detailed, loving descriptions of species of birds, flowers, animals, and seasons, Grandfather describing the woody, nurturing environment of the midwest and Abbey the harsh environment of the desert. They both admonish the reader to slow down: What's the rush? Grandfather preaches at length on walking (and makes small fun of himself for doing so) and even dismays his readers with the notion that nature appreciation by car is an oxymoron at best; Abbey, at the end of a paragraph that, in full, should be read only by mature adults, preaches: "...I entreat you, get out of those motorized wheelchairs, get off your foam-rubber backsides, stand up straight like men! and women! like human beings! and walk—walk—WALK upon our sweet and blessed land!" In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey spends an entire chapter on the problems of what he calls "Industrial Tourism," (i.e., the degree to which even minimal development of wilderness benefits tourism, which is then compounded by the self-interested lobbying of the tourist industry in behalf of more and more development: I'm inclined to agree with the problematic aspects of this feedback); Grandfather's gentler admonition (in V. VIII) is:

Why don't we just take our vacations in May? Perhaps it's just as well we don't. Give the birds a chance to nest, the flowers a chance to bloom, the fish a chance to spawn, before the great industry of vacationing the public begins.

On the other hand, the ideal of fifty years ago sometimes disagrees with Abbey's newer environmental ethic: Grandfather wanted to bring the "parks to the people"; now the approach is to isolate the two. Fences were to be crossed carefully and respectfully in 1937; today they are to be broached and destroyed. Perhaps these changes are only a reflection of our lack of progress toward what Grandfather was suggesting then. Would he agree with the newer, more strident approach? Maybe so. I recall that he seemed increasingly depressed in his later years by society's continued lack of respect for nature. In any case, I am proud to be called an "environmentalist," even if I may be more conservative in that regard than some of my contemporaries. Perhaps my conservative version of environmentalism is genetically derived.

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In compiling these essays, I have used a certain amount of editorial discretion to eliminate what I may call "publisher's boilerplate"—he was trying to sell magazines, after all. My intent is to capture the essence of a man who was enthralled by the beauty and intricacy of nature, to recapture, if you will, the ideas and feelings that have shaped so strongly my own attitudes about nature. These ideas and feelings serve me well here in Colorado, and I am grateful for having had the exposure to them as a child.

Howard P. Hanson
Boulder, 1991

Through the Cabin Window

Volume I: January—June, 1936

Born of a genuine love of nature, NATURE NOTES, The Magazine of Outdoor Information, makes its bow.

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This magazine intends to fight for *effective* conservation. The first step, obviously, is to bring to the attention of people the wonders and beauties of the world in which they live. This should be done not so much through nature *study*, as through nature as a *hobby*.

Here is a nature magazine that is edited out in the country—not next door to nature—but right in the middle of one of nature’s gardens! From where I sit I could easily toss a stone to a clump of yellow lady’s slippers that are slumbering under the snow on a woody hillside. And those lady slippers weren’t put there by man, they are the wild kind and they must have been planted by the birds or the wind.

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I never knew ’til this minute that juncos outranked titmice. I have been gazing through the Cabin Window, watching the winter birds as they vie with one another for the pork fat I’ve placed out there. It’s perfectly obvious that there are ranks in birdland as everywhere else. The chickadees give precedence to the downies, the downies to the energetic nuthatches, the nuthatches to the titmice, and all make way for those big boys in blue, the jays. Then, there are ranking personages among the blue jays themselves! It’s all settled and very well defined. For some reason a little junco has lately developed an appetite for pork fat. He flew up over the edge of the feeding shelf just now and all the titmice scrambled.

It is tremendously interesting to feed the birds and watch their doings. This seems to be one of those old fashioned winters that our grandmothers declared were a special product of the ’60’s. The birds are very cold and very hungry. Are YOU doing something to help them?

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The other day I had occasion to look between the covers of a recent book on psychology. The author makes many weighty and high-sounding observations. But, come right down to it, many of the things he says are things that everybody who would read such a book already knows.

Here, for instance, is a summary of one section: The happy man has some strong Central Sentiment around which his life revolves. It may be business, children, or something else. If a

man's Central Sentiment is taken away, he is lost—he is like a ship without a rudder, liable to be wrecked on the nearest rock, *unless he has in reserve some other sentiment which can become the central one.*

Now, if I were going to state this in another way, I'd say, "Everyone should have a hobby."

At any rate, we who have nature, either as a Central Sentiment or as a hobby, are fortunate. For who can take nature away from us? We may lose every cent we possess; but expensive equipment is not necessary for the enjoyment of nature. All we need do is open our eyes.

Indeed, suppose even our eyes fail us. There remain the songs of birds, the odors of blossoms, the tangy taste of outdoor things, and the soft, caressing winds of spring.

I repeat, we are fortunate.

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The ice is going out of the river. Just outside the Cabin Window bluebirds are calling. I heard the plaintive notes of a killdeer as he sailed over the orchard. Certain early plants are taking advantage of every minute of sunshine to force themselves into growth. All this means that though we may wake up some morning to find upon the land the face of winter, the heart of spring will be underneath.

Why don't you get outside this spring and enjoy nature? Soak up the health-giving sunlight. Make it a point to learn more about the birds you will hear, the trees you will see and the blossoms you will enjoy. What's your hurry anyway? The more you rush through life, the sooner it will be over with. Stop a minute to look at nature. You'll find some interesting things.

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Your editor loves to walk. He has two fine large feet, which, given time, will take him almost anywhere. Walking is exhilarating exercise, It brings oxygen into the body, it obtains for the walker the beneficial effects of sunlight or strong daylight. The elimination of poisons and by-products of life is promoted. Walking does in a gentle, unspectacular way everything that athletics will do for you. And the delicious weariness at the end of a long hike is conducive to deep and refreshing slumber.

I do not see anything "queer" in preferring this form of exercise. It strikes me as a perfectly rational procedure, for a person to walk if he wants to. But how hard it is to walk in this day and age!

Not long ago I wanted to see a friend who lives about a mile along the concrete highway from the Cabin. I decided to walk and see what birds could be seen along the way.

Even as I passed through my front gate there was a screeching of brakes and a generous motorist stopped to offer me a lift. My polite refusal caused a look of wonderment to come into his eyes.

I was just getting warmed up and was thinking how pleasant it was to be out in the spring sunshine when an acquaintance of mine who lives in constant fear of being snubbed, overtook me. Here was his chance to do a charitable thing. His car door was open for me even before the big car itself came to a halt. For a moment I wavered. Now there would be complications if I didn't get in and ride! Just then a meadowlark—the first one of the season---burst into honest song from the top of a fencepost. I tried to explain to my acquaintance my need for exercise as a sort of spring tonic and how I had decided that a little walk would be just the thing for me. It all sounded, of course, like a pretty thin excuse.

“You don't look sick,” he remarked, and his car started ahead with an eloquent jerk.

My friend, when I arrived at his home, was mightily concerned about my plight. To have to walk a mile! Why, a phone call and he'd have been right over after me, if my car were not available. He'd see that I got home all right. It would save me lots of time.

“Save me time for what?” I asked..

“Why er—, isn't there something you want to do when you get back?”

“I suppose there is,” I admitted. “When I get home, I'm going for a little walk.”

Of course, I should rejoice that the spirit of helpfulness still exists in the world, no matter from what source it springs. But I can't help feeling sorry that walking has fallen into such bad repute. A nation of walkers is a nation of nature lovers.

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Ye editor sits at his desk, wondering what to say to the gentle readers of this publication. He gazes out through the Window to where bittersweet vines festoon white oak trees; to where chipmunks frolic and nuthatches scold. It's his own fault, if what he says has not the flavor of nature.

A young friend asks, “When you are trying to identify a bird near a paved road on a Sunday afternoon, doesn't it make you a bit embarrassed to have automobile loads of people gawk at you with open mouths, as if you yourself were some queer specimen?”

In my younger days this used to bother me immensely. But I now have reached the age when I don't care. Then too, a few years back there were not nearly so many people chasing birds as there are today, and one of them was no doubt a legitimate object of gawkage. I used to try to conceal my field glasses and look nonchalant when strangers approached, but I probably merely succeeded in appearing furtive. Now, I am proud to belong to that advanced group of people who appreciate the wonders of nature.

A valued subscriber whom we wouldn't offend for the world, since we need every one we have and then some, writes, “In your April editorial you state that a nation of walkers is a nation of nature lovers. Cannot riders, be nature lovers, too?”

Yes, riders can be nature lovers, but are they? Riding—even at fifteen miles per hour—precludes intimate acquaintanceship with nature. And how can there be true love without intimacy?

The above paragraph will demonstrate clearly that no automobile manufacturer has as yet subsidized this magazine.

In a recent issue of *Better Homes & Gardens* one sees the following:

It's no longer necessary to rob the woods and fields and to break laws to have a wildflower garden, for the nurseries have 'gone native.' They now cultivate just the wildflowers you'll want for every spot.

Sometimes it seems that the whole world is motivated by the desire to break laws and get away with it. Perhaps there are still a few folks who try to observe laws simply because they are laws, but such people are rather hard to find. At any rate, for these few it will be a matter of gratification to learn that it is no longer necessary to rob the woods; to break laws.

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Little things that cheer me up: The June sunshine slanting down through the apple trees. Baltimore orioles building a nest somewhere in the elms. A crow, flapping erratically across the hollow, seeing me and veering off to one side. Headed bluegrass nodding in graceful undulations before an east wind. Clumps of yarrow along the roadside. Sawed wood ticked up and seasoning for next winter's fires.

The other evening (last May 19th) there was a fluttering at the window and we saw a luna moth, one of the most beautiful of all creatures, beating itself against the screen. In the beam of a powerful electric torch, it was content to remain motionless while we enjoyed its delicate beauty. That such a creature could exist is marvel enough. That it should come to our window is almost too good to be true. But there it was: How exquisite were its broad yellow-green wings, the hindmost pair drawn out into long fragile streamers, the others edged along the front with royal purple. The plump body was snowy white, the legs were a rich chestnut color and the fern-like antennae were spread as if to catch the faint radio waves that might tell of a mate near-by.

It is an event, this seeing a luna, that we look forward to each year. For on an average of once every twelve months in this part of the country we are permitted a glimpse of one of these living, throbbing, Moths of the Moon.

As we go to press the adult seventeen year cicada is beginning to make its appearance. Soon the forests will be ringing with the songs of this remarkable insect. If you find a fearsome looking (but harmless) creature with cellophane wings and veinings near the wing tips in the shape of a W, you will have found a seventeen year cicada, erroneously called locust.

In the form of a white "grub" this cicada remains in the ground for seventeen dark years. Then, as if a message had been passed along that the time was up, all the grubs come out of the

ground within the space of a few weeks and change into adults. A month or two of glorious life in the sunshine, the females lay their eggs under the bark of twigs, and life ends for the cicadas.

The only harm done by these insects is the piercing of the twigs of trees during this process of egg laying. Many of the twigs break and hang all summer with withered leaves. This may reduce the yield of fruit trees, but large forest and shade trees seem to suffer no permanent injury from the swarms.

The present swarm of these cicadas will not surround the Cabin, but will be found within fifty miles of it. The range includes an irregular area in the eastern part of the United States, south of the Great Lakes and north of central Georgia, extending westward only to eastern and southern Illinois.

A separate and distinct swarm covers territory farther west, and when this comes out, we at the Cabin will be able to study these long-lived insects. This latter swarm came out of the ground in 1905 and 1922 and will be due again three years hence.

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume II: July—December, 1936

Whereas the human youngster requires years of careful nurturing before it is able to fend for itself, the young of song birds are nestlings for only a few days.

A month ago birds were hopefully building their nests, urged on by the age-old family instinct. Today they are leading their little families around through the tree tops, teaching them how to hunt for themselves.

Everywhere now I see healthy appearing young robins with their spotted breasts.. The Berwick's wrens that nested under the summer house are leading their six children about the place and they scold me frightfully whenever I come across them.

Yesterday I watched a hungry family of titmice being fed en route through the treetops by harassed parents. There is a mysterious shuffling noise in the oaks near the Cabin Window and here is a brood of young nuthatches, each coming headfirst down a bole, exactly as the old birds do. Out near a hedgerow that cuts across a prairie I saw several immature shrikes hunting the grasshoppers that are threatening to become too numerous in some parts of the state.

And now, in many cases, the second clutch of eggs is being incubated. I have just finished photographing the nest of a field sparrow. There are four bluish eggs, blotched with chocolate brown. In a dead limb of an apple tree a pair of bluebirds have made their second home of the season, even while the young of the first are hanging around asking for food.

These are only the few instances that have happened to come to my notice. In any region there are thousands of pairs of birds of many species nesting at least once each season. Even allowing for mishaps which devastate many a bird home—especially near human dwellings—there must still be a vast number of young birds reared yearly.

And how they eat! Taking the country as a whole I think it is safe to say that many thousands of tons of insects disappear into their unfillable maws. If anyone thinks that birds are not of practical value, he has another "think" coming to him.

When I consider the frightening rapidity with which insects could multiply if left unchecked, I am profoundly thankful that birds exist.

It has been estimated that the progeny of a single pair of gypsy moths could in eight years time become so numerous as to destroy every vestige of foliage in the United States. Many other harmful insects could do as bad or worse.

Take the case of the aphids or plant lice which are eaten by many of the smaller birds. Here we have a real power of multiplication. Some species of plant lice have as many as twelve or more generations in one season. Edward Howe Forbush states that if each female lived and produced 100 young (a conservative figure) the number of individuals in the twelfth generation alone would be ten sextillions (10,000,000,000,000,000,000). If these ten sextillions of plant lice were to arrange themselves in a straight line, with ten individuals to the inch, the line would reach from the earth to a star so remote that the light from it would take 2500 years to reach us.

How fortunate it is that not every plant louse is allowed to live the richer life! How wise was nature to in providing birds to help prevent the overpowering multiplication of insects!

We nature lovers, therefore, are not sentimentalizing when we say that our song birds should be protected. Our song birds must be protected. It is a case of absolute necessity.

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This is being written in the "New Cabin." It is new, at least, in outward appearance, being built of old, well-seasoned lumber from a demolished barn. It is the sanctum from which the growing business of NATURE NOTES will be conducted in the future.

Perched on the rim of a ravine, with a grand studio Window which looks directly into the woods, this Cabin should be a fitting headquarters for a nature publication such as this one. The main sanctum or "thinking room" is lined with knotty white pine which is merely the siding of the old barn—nail holes and all—turned wrong side out and smoothed off a bit with sandpaper.

Another and still rougher room will provide working space for sorting, wrapping and mailing and other athletic operations which are part and parcel of any magazine. Storage space, too, for back numbers, used engravings and other things has been provided.

We trust that the smooth operation of our editorial, circulation, advertising, and book departments will be in evidence. If our operations are not business-like, at least, in such a location, they should be sort of "natural-like."

While we were reading the proof of last month's article on wasps' nests, we discovered the tiny jug nest of a potter wasp on the screen door to the Cabin! This little nest is mounted on the head of one of the screws in the screen door hinge. It is on the half of the hinge that swings with the door. We are going in and out very cautiously so as not to let the door slam. Apparently the insects, at least, have accepted us as part of their environment.

Mud-dauber wasps, too, have begun their nests about the building. But work is progressing very slowly on account of the scarcity of wet clay. The unprecedented dry spell has caused streams and ponds to dry up and the wasps' sources of supply for building material are gone.

When we water the flower beds, wasps quickly gather in great numbers, bite out little pellets of clay, and leave the surface of the mud dotted with their jaw marks.

And under the edge of a concrete block, that has been set tentatively in place for a walk to the Cabin door, my attention is drawn to some sort of goings-on, and there is one of the big cicada-killing wasps, busily engaged in building her nest!

Have we built a wasp sanctuary?

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A letter which I value highly is written in a round, copy-book hand and reads as follows:

Bancroft School,
Minneapolis, Minn.
May 14, 1936

Mr. James Sedgwick,
Editor Nature Notes,
Peoria, Ill.

Dear Mr. Sedgwick

One of the teachers in our building gets your little magazine each month. We saw an article in it called, "Observations on Robins." On one of our nature trips we saw two robins act in a strange way so we decided to write you about it. This is what we saw. We were sitting on the edge of a swamp. A male robin came and began to dig and eat worms. After a while he continued to dig the worms but instead of eating them he piled them up. Then in a few minutes a female robin swooped down and gathered the worms which the male had dug. She flew off. The male continued to dig and eat for a few minutes and then he flew off.

Don't you think it was unusual?

Yours truly,

Children in Room 7

In answering such a letter from young people one must face a great responsibility. This letter could be answered in such a way as to thoroughly disgust the children in Room 7, making them lose the interest in nature that their teachers have carefully built up. A gushing or patronizing type of letter would undoubtedly do this, since children are especially sensitive to such attitudes and resent them.

On the other hand, he who answers this letter has the opportunity of making the children feel that nature is worth while and of turning many of them to it as a hobby.

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Goldenrod and asters are nodding near the Cabin door. Soaking rains have come and the heat, which seemed almost unbearable at times, has given way to cool, caressing breezes from the east.

Inside the Cabin a friendly fire crackles on the hearth, White-footed mice, bent on laying in enough acorns to last the winter through, can be heard scurrying across the attic floor.

Nature once more this year has tortured us with biting cold, with drought, with scorching heat. But she was only testing us to see if we are fit to live in her world. The sooner we adapt ourselves—mentally—to nature’s caprices, the happier we will be, and the longer we will be here.

Thank goodness for common names! Not that the scientific names of plants and animals are especially hard to learn. Anyone with even a moderate amount of intelligence can as easily learn to say *Papilio* as swallowtail butterfly. In fact, once you have the swing of it, most scientific names roll off the tongue with the greatest of ease.

The worst thing about scientific names is that they are constantly changing, like the banks of a stream. They are the shifting sands, while the common names are the bench marks.

Twenty or more years ago, when I learned my biology, I could quote you scientific names with great confidence. Today many of the names are remembered, but I am afraid to use them without first going to my newest books to make sure that they are still in force.

Then the common bracken fern was *Pteris aquilina*; now it’s *Pteridium latiusculum*. Then the common shiner minnow belonged to the genus *Notropis*; today it shines in the genus *Luxilus*. In those days, if I caught a largemouthed black bass, I had caught a specimen of either *Huro floridana* or *Micropterus salmoides*, according to which school of thought I followed. Now those schools have embraced each other, and if I am lucky enough to land one of those superb fishes, I’ve caught a *Huro salmoides*. Tomorrow it may be a *Micropterus floridana*!

Similar cases could be cited practically without end. Indoor scientists seem to be having a grand time tinkering with scientific names and switching them about, both with and without reason. But fortunately for you and me the common names haven’t changed very much. If common names begin changing too, the only way we will know what we are talking about is to have a specimen in hand and call it “this.”

Thus I can’t help smiling a little when I read that the scientific name is the landmark by which a plant or an animal is universally known. The common popular name is the landmark. Try as they may, scientists will have a hard time changing the latter, because the masses of people know such names and hand them down from generation to generation.

Thank goodness for common names!

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Well, the annual war against the ducks is now on in these parts. From the Cabin, on the first day of the season, we could hear the ceaseless bombardment along the banks of the Illinois. That modern invention, the shotgun, was being brought into play against ducks that had begun to feel secure in the wild rice fields and the bayous; against young ducks that had never been shot at.

I journeyed to the river’s edge and walked along. I saw maimed ducks, duck feathers and ducks’ wings floating on the water. I saw demoralized flights of ducks coming down the river,

trying to find a safe place to land. I heard salvo after salvo as some hapless flock came near the fortified marshes, I saw a flock wiped out in four seconds, wiped out all but one which flew about in panic, drawing the enemies' fire from near and far.

I saw men in a skiff edging toward a flock of ducks that were peacefully riding the waves. Even while these birds were skimming the water in their clumsy attempts to get into the air, there was a furious bombardment that rocked the boat, and ducks, feet uppermost, were splashing the water in their death struggles.

Men were getting their ducks. I wondered if next year there will be ducks enough left so that all this fun may go on.

At another point I saw men dragging the river, and a little crowd on the bank opposite to where a skiff had gone down. The ducks had gotten their man.

Bird lovers the nation over will regret to learn that Winthrop Packard has retired as Secretary-Treasurer of the Massachusetts Audubon Society and editor of the Society's Bulletin. During his many years of service, the Society has grown to a membership of well over ten thousand with a reserve fund of some three hundred thousand dollars.

The famous Moose Hill Bird Sanctuary is owned and maintained by the Society. An enormous amount of educational work has been done among children as well as adults. In fact, it is not too much to say that a great part of the interest in birds and nature which has arisen in the Nation at large can be traced back to the activities of the Massachusetts Audubon Society under Winthrop Packard's stewardship.

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In the late autumn one reads in the newspapers all sorts of predictions about the coming winter. This year I have read that it's going to be a mild winter because the squirrels are not storing many nuts; that it's going to be a severe winter because the bark of the trees is thick; and that there will be much snow because a certain bush on the Menominee Indian Reservation bore its berries high. No doubt, too, somebody with a gift for seeing has predicted that we'll have little, if any, snow. The only thing about the whole business that seems to be absolutely certain is that next spring one of the prophets will be saying, "I told you so!"

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume III: January—June, 1937

Reports reaching the Cabin seem to indicate that in many places birds last autumn feasted on cultivated grapes more than is usually the case. Certain it is that a good share of our own grapes went to satisfy the hunger of cardinals, robins, white-throated sparrows, bluebirds and many others.

This is, however, not a loss. It is a gain. The drought caused failure of many crops of wild fruits and berries on which birds naturally feed. So they had to turn to grape arbors for sustenance. Our place was swarming with birds, as long as the grapes lasted. Who knows how many bird lives were saved in this emergency by our scraggly bunches of grapes? Who knows how many insects that harm our growing things will be eaten by these same birds next year? If all the facts could be accurately set down, we are certain that the balance would be found on the profit side of the ledger.

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Good News:

A warm and sunny December in this part of the country has been easy on the coal pile, and has kept many blades of grass green right up to the first of the year. Following duck hunting season, ducks have been seen by the thousands along the Illinois River. It would appear that they were not entirely exterminated by the sportsmen who came from near and far to shoot at them. We would not suggest that any of these hunters missed, but perhaps many of them are indeed sportsmen and did not exceed the bag limits. As a check on the other kind of hunter, game wardens have been unusually active and numerous.

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A warm and sociable friend is the "Morning Star." It stands in the middle of the Cabin room where I write. It is connected with the chimney flue by means of a long, black pipe with an elbow in the middle. Whenever I put a log of wood or a handful of corncobs in it and open the little sliding draft in the front there are creaking noises which mean that its iron ribs are expanding, or contracting, I can't decide which. Again it creaks when the round stove lid on top is removed; in fact it often just creaks with no apparent reason. That's why I say it's a sociable friend.

This little stove was given to me by my Mother to whom it had descended. It is gothic-shape, with well rounded sides, like a plump old pony. On its front door is its name

“Morning Star,” above a coat-of-arms in bas relief. Other legends inform the curious that it is the inspired work of Wm. Resor & Co., done at Cincinnati, in 1871.

I’m bound to say that, antique or no antique, this stove is a dandy. Come out to the Cabin of a winter’s morn when there are icicles hanging all around the edges of the roof, when the wind off the prairie bites your cheek, wad in some paper, throw in some kindling, and before you can say chickadee, it has the room up to eighty. I doubt if there’s a stove built today that gets more heat out of a piece of wood.

The flat, removable lid on top of a saddle-like piece of iron is perhaps one of Mr. Resor’s happiest touches. In the first place, it solves the cuspidor problem very nicely and George, the handy man, is acquainted with all its possibilities. He never fails to use it when he comes inside and I sometimes think he comes in for that express purpose.

In the second place you can fry an egg and boil a pot of coffee on this lid in case there’s a special luncheon or something going on up at the house and you don’t want to appear in your long editorial hair.

I understand that my Grandmother used to hop out of bed in the dead of a Dakota winter and warm her fleecy unmentionables by this stove. Just think, and now it’s helping me write editorials!

Fashion Note:

In attempts to regain their youthful figures some people starve themselves (with time out at the confectioner’s), some make feeble efforts to follow radio exercises, and some take hikes. These last get much of nature’s curative—oxygen; they are spiritually uplifted; and they come back happy over the new things seen, new acquaintances made.

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Sitting in a college lecture room recently I saw several reels of “sound movies” explaining various phenomena of nature. One reel, for instance, showed the actual growth of plant roots with the action speeded up so that we could actually see the roots’ tips feeling their way through the soil. Another reel depicted within the space of a few minutes the advance and retreat of the great ice sheets that covered North America many thousands of years ago.

I could not help thinking how many aids to learning there are these days. One could study volume after volume and not get as clear and comprehensive an idea of the ice age as one can by seeing a carefully prepared movie—diagram such as the one I viewed. And, somehow, these reels were intensely interesting. The audience was fascinated. It stands to reason that such teaching aids as these will help to turn out students whose interest in nature has been sharpened, instead of killed by a lot of dry data which has to be learned from text books.

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I am a great believer in hiking for what ails you. That is, of course, if you can possibly drag one foot ahead of another. And if you can't do that, you can take vicarious hikes by reading NATURE NOTES!

You will notice that we are running articles designed to encourage you to get out in the open where the air is fresh and the unaltered sunlight can get at you. This month we suggest some things to look for in early spring. Next month we shall try further to stimulate your interest and get you out doors. Soon we'll have an article on what happens inside you when you hike. Hiking, you know, is not only good for you physically, but mentally as well.

Yes, hiking is conducive to thinking. It also gives you a better perspective on things. I know a business man who never fails to take a hike when he has an important decision to make. His hulk is moulded to fit in a capacious swivel chair but he grits his teeth and goes out in the woods and sits on a stump, which is his way of hiking. He tells me that he comes back "refreshed, revived, and reduced." I think by reduced he means that his sense of importance has been taken down a peg. All of which is black ink on his ledger.

Why don't *you* take more hikes this spring?

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At this writing the stock market is poised half-way between a boom and a wreck. Spaniard is still killing Spaniard, the highway toll is increasing as usual, newspapers carry more bad news than good; but, meadowlarks are whistling from fence posts, cottony clouds are floating serenely in a turquoise sky, and hepaticas are blooming on my hillside!

Nature goes on from year to year, from century to century and from aeon to aeon in very much the same way, regardless of the feverish pursuits of men.

It used to be the fashion in some quarters to laugh at such things as birds and flowers. They were too sweet and old fashioned, or something, for a practical world. But the "practical world" is getting itself into such a mess that it's beginning to feel a bit chagrined over itself and to wonder if, after all, the birds and flowers don't know more about the art of existence than do human beings.

General John J. Pershing, hard-boiled veteran of several campaigns, stood listening to the song of a red bird, so a newspaper report stated the other day. Newspapermen asked if he had something to say about the entrance of the United States into the World War twenty years ago.

"Hush gentlemen," said Pershing, "the song of that red bird is more important to me than recollections of war."

Shortened hours for work, development of highways, and unemployment have been some of the things that have given rise to a demand for more and more national parks. The Chief Forester of the National Park Service reports that in 1929 the number of visitors to our parks and

monuments was 3,248,264. In 1936 the number of visitors was recorded as 9,929,432. That is an increase of 205 percent in seven years!

The above items, gleaned from the daily press, seem to support my argument that we are turning to nature. At any rate, it won't hurt you a bit to regard the birds and flowers this spring. Find out what they are, and how they live. Go out into quiet places in search of them. Then you'll have one foot on solid ground, even if the other foot is trying to run on a whirling, endless belt.

John Burroughs, born one hundred years ago this month, lived to a ripe old age in a troubled world. And this was his philosophy:

I am in love with this world...It has been home. It has been my point of outlook upon the universe. I have not bruised myself against it, nor tried to use it ignobly. I have tilled its soil, I have gathered its harvests, I have waited upon its seasons and always have I reaped what I have sown. While I delved I did not lose sight of the sky overhead. While I gathered its bread and meat for my body I did not neglect to gather its bread and meat for my soul. I have climbed its mountains, roamed its forests, sailed its waters, crossed its deserts, felt the sting of its frosts, the oppression of its heats, the drench of its rains, the fury of its winds, and always have beauty and joy waited upon my goings and comings.

The nature fakir is abroad in the land. With the growth in the public's interest in nature, with more magazines printing articles on nature than previously, it is perhaps to be expected that some writers will turn out stories about birds or animals that seem to deviate from the truth.

Not so long ago I picked up a little magazine, one of the numerous "Digests" that are for sale on the newsstands, The magazine was called "The Fact Digest." One of the articles was headed "Unbelievable but Verified." It reviewed an article said to be by a lieutenant commander in the United States Navy. He told the following story in substance:

A pair of English sparrows and one of their young somehow became interested in the Lieutenant Commander and his family. That was in Kansas City. The family took a trip to New York City. The sparrows followed all the way, keeping pace. The birds followed the people back again to Kansas City.

One day at 5:30 P.M. the Lieutenant Commander and his family boarded a train for San Francisco, They entered a car and drew the shades, supposing that the birds would remain for a while at the station and then return to their neighborhood. At Cheyenne, Wyoming, the naval officer thought he heard the voice of one of these sparrows, but cast it aside as impossible. "It was not until we were descending the Rockies that I looked back and saw the three Beeps in close formation taking a short cut across one of the curves following the train. Apparently they flew over the train in the daytime, all the while raiding for food. At night I believe they boarded the train, riding on the roof directly over our compartment. But of this I am not sure...

A little later, the Lieutenant Commander and his family boarded a boat for Honolulu. The sparrows escorted them to the Golden Gate, and apparently turned back when they saw

the big ocean ahead. But to climax the whole affair the birds later turned up in Shanghai to greet their human friends.

“Naturally,” the Lieutenant Commander is quoted as saying, “I am very sentimental about these birds, but observations have been kept scientific. The birds really belong to my wife who maintains their interest is due to the fact that she talks to them rather than to her feeding them.”

Does the navy man’s story contain a shred of truth? Certainly it makes interesting reading for the public. But I can’t swallow it. Ask any trained ornithologist what he thinks of it. My wager is that he will become wracked with pain as I was when I read it.

Here at NATURE NOTES headquarters we have to be constantly on guard against articles of this kind. Our constant endeavor is to give you material that is truthful as well as interesting. There are so many fascinating things in nature that are true, that it’s not necessary to invent impossible tales to add readability to our pages.

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There is a certain satisfaction in having helped, in some small way, to maintain the world’s supply of beauty.

Last April a pair of bluebirds made up their minds about furnishing an apartment. It was for rent to be paid in flashes of blue and sharp-eyed vigilance in the matter of caterpillars. This apartment had been placed, purposely, where it could be seen from my desk in the Cabin.

The finest of grasses went in through the door to be used for the bulk of the nest, with even finer material for a lining. The male stood for minutes at a time with his head and neck inside while his movements suggested that he was critically inspecting the work and offering advice on the weaving of the snuggery. (What male wouldn’t grasp such an opportunity to be helpful?)

On the 22nd day of April it appeared to me—though of this I can’t be certain because I was careful to respect the premises—that the female had begun to incubate her eggs. She was jittery, as becomes a lady of the 1930’s. Many of the usual noises of the neighborhood made her come to the door and look out. One of those terribly nerve-destroying automobile horns that some manufacturers have thought necessary to put on cars of late, kept my bluebird on pins and needles, as some imperious young man’s fancies turned to love a quarter mile or so down the road.

Even the wind, swirling about her home post, was enough to bring her to the door, and my sneezes due to a spring cold, caused her great alarm. I am certain that for the first day or two those eggs received precious little incubation.

But as the days went by she gradually became accustomed to things outside her home. The male, cooing reassuringly, would appear from time to time with a caterpillar for her, and at last she was so secure of her safety that she scarcely peeked out at all. More than once I feared she had left for good.

On the 9th of May great activity indicated that the Event had taken place. It is entirely possible that the 8th or the 7th had seen the Event, but I was not here and thus was deprived of knowing the exact date. Suffice it that both parents were out diligently scouting for insects of the proper size to feed to nestlings.

One sunny day I decided to make an attempt at photographing the parents. Remembering the state of the mother's nerves, I set up my camera some fifty feet from the nest box, hoping to enlarge the resulting photograph to a reasonable size. Tying a thread to the shutter release, I remained inside the Cabin.

Scarcely a minute had passed before the female was feeding the young. She paid not the slightest attention to the camera.

Thus inspired, I moved the camera up to thirty feet. The male perched on a post close to it as if curious to know more about the object with the glittering eye. So I moved my apparatus to a point nineteen feet from the nest and from there without any trouble at all, made several bluebird portraits. Even the sharp click, as the shutter machinery was released, did not alarm the birds.

On May 18th the last youngster, viewing the world through the apartment's round doorway, decided to launch himself into that world where his parents found so many fine caterpillars. Today we have seven bluebirds about the place swooping, now and then, to the lawn to capture unfortunate insects.

The parents, I know, are considering fixing up the nest and raising another brood. Shall we some day have twelve?

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume IV: July—December, 1937

If you have ever seen a big man heroically killing a garter snake and carrying it at arm's length draped over a five-foot pole while women and children fluttered into the background, perhaps you have gained the idea that mankind's fear of serpents is ingrained and can never be overcome. Mother Eve, you say, was betrayed by a serpent, therefore man always will dread crawling things.

I am inclined to think, however, that this fear is due, not so much to instinct, as it is to lack of knowledge on the subject. Naturally you don't want to be on intimate terms with anything until you know it is perfectly harmless.

Of recent years, perhaps largely due to the interesting writings of Dr. Raymond L. Ditmars, more and more people have begun to take an interest in snakes. More magazine articles—one of which will be found in this issue of NATURE NOTES—are being published on the subject. More snake books are being written—the latest of which is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. And it is a good thing this is so. For the public's knowledge of snakes should be widened. Not so many helpful species will then be sacrificed to unreasoning fear.

Even if you live in the world's largest city, you should at least have a smattering of snake lore. Recently a frantic call was received at a police station in Greater New York. "A snake is loose in my garage," screamed a voice. The police radio swung into action. Three squad cars rushed to the place. Six police officers surrounded and killed an eight-inch garter snake!

A fourteen-year-old boy was bitten by a snake in New Jersey. His companion killed the snake and ran to a near-by highway where he fortunately met a patrolman. In a mad race against death the frightened victim was rushed through busy New York City to the Zoological Park where snake serum is on hand. "What kind of a snake was it?" asked the head keeper. The mangled remains were fetched from the police car. "That," said the head keeper with a grin, "is a milk snake. It's about as harmless as milk, too."

Learn a little about the snakes of your region. Respect the bad ones, if there are any, but what's the use of mashing the head of every vertebrate without hips?

Dr. Ditmars, who for thirty-seven years has been curator of mammals and reptiles at the New York Zoological Park, is conducting experiments in cooperation with medical men to determine the value of snake venom as a medicine.

Venom from the moccasin snakes (copperheads and water moccasins) is used in developing a serum that is said to have shown beneficial results in the war against epilepsy, hemophilia and malignant growths.

The day may come when we will look upon even the dreaded copperhead as a friend to man! So, let's not judge anything too harshly. Maybe science will even find a good use for the pestiferous mosquito.

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“So it's moths, now,” said Mrs. Editor with a look in her eye. “Yes,” I admitted weakly, “it's moths. They've got me.”

About every two or three years, ye Editor rediscovers some new and marvelous department of nature. It is as if he were going down the dim corridor of life, ever and anon coming to a bright and shining room, a crystal palace, where vistas new to him open up view beyond view. They surpass anything he has ever dreamed of in his sweetest slumber.

What is most wonderful, these are not forbidden rooms. They may be entered and freely explored and in each one he finds contentment. The price of admission is not exorbitant: a few cents for insect pins, a dollar or two for guide books. A good lens and a few other tools he has carried from room to room and they still serve him well .

There are congenial friends, too, in each room, people who are making the same wonderful “Discoveries.” And the memories of those other rooms we have visited remain always fresh and green.

Over the door of one room—that was some distance back—was lettered “Native Birds”; over another “Ferns,” and so on. Now ye Editor has disappeared into the marvelous place labeled “Moths.”

Already he has a tidy little collection. Every night now for some time he has placed a bright light in the Window that overlooks the woods. This brings swarms of moths of all sizes to the screen. He doesn't have any qualms about clapping a few of the dainty creatures into a cyanide jar, because many of them are pests anyway. His grape leaf skeletonizer was somewhat torn in spreading and now he's looking for another. But his Cecropias are in perfect shape. Some of the micro-moths, he found, were mighty hard to put on the spreading board, but his fingers are now becoming a little more expert. He has a beautiful specimen of the hummingbird moth with rich greens and deep reds and clear cellophane windows in its wings. (This was collected over the larkspurs in daylight.) His Noctuids have by no means all been identified, but that can be done on winter evenings.

Not yet has he collected a royal walnut moth, but when that day comes—oh, boy!

“So it's moths now,” said Mrs. Editor and she settled down to read by herself.

“Yes,” I admitted, a little sheepishly, “it’s moths. There’s something about them. They’ve got me.”

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A reader in California writes, “I was interested in seeing that a nature magazine is being published in Peoria. I was born in Farmington, Illinois, and remember going to Peoria two or three times while I was a small child. No one would have thought then that it would ever be the scene of a literary effort.”

To which we reply, “What literary effort?”

The good old cottonwood has been selected as the official state tree of Kansas. This rapid growing friend of the pioneer holds an honored place in the heart of many a midwestern youth. I remember how, in years gone by, we used to hear the warbling vireos talking to themselves as they examined the cottonwood blossoms in May. A little later, the streets and walks would be almost covered by drifts of cottony fibers. One gigantic cottonwood was always used as “base” for our games of tag, and respected was the youth who dared climb it to a certain dizzy height where a pair of screech owls always had their nest. Scorned is the cottonwood tree by some, but not by many a country lad, and not now by Kansas.

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Sooner or later every hiker finds a fence staring him in the face. The problem, then, is whether to cross over, go around, or turn back. Since our motives are pure, since few of us carry guns, and since we may even have the permission of the landowner, many times the decision is, “Cross the line.”

In general, the act of crossing a fence, is not a dignified one. How fortunate that there are few fences on Michigan Avenue! Usually our fellow hikers are the sole witnesses to our humiliation and they must do the same thing.

There are many kinds of fences. Each calls for a different technique. There are species and subspecies, one might say. When you have mastered a tightly strung barbed wire fence, for instance, that gives you no special knowledge of how to get through a loose one, where every wire swoops down and enwraps its victim like an octopus.

Keep trying until you have mastered each and every kind. Not until you can cross a fence in a half-way efficient manner are you entitled to be a leader and take groups of people afield. You can get away with telling them that a mourning dove is a great auk, but if you can’t do better at the fences than they can, you lose their respect.

A word of caution which I hope is unnecessary. I have helped make fence in the heat of the summer and I know how hard it is to put up a good one. Be always careful in crossing not to damage the fence in any way. Climb a stout post where the wire is less likely to be bent out of shape. We have all seen fences that have been ruthlessly damaged by hunters or others who have

gone that way. Be a fence conservationist. Be as careful of the other man's property as though it were your own; it represents hard work and an outlay of cash.

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Donald Culross Peattie, nature writer extraordinary, author of "Green Laurels," "An Almanac for Moderns," etc., has delighted many a reader of the *Chicago Daily News* with his little corner called "A Breath of Outdoors."

Upon several occasions, when Mr. Peattie mentioned NATURE NOTES in a friendly manner we received stacks of letters—some from as far away as Wichita—enclosing clippings from his column. Many asked to see copies of our magazine and subsequently came to be numbered among our valued subscribers.

And now we look through the Daily News in vain. For with the issue of October 16th the editors saw fit to discontinue the nature articles, in the belief, I suppose, that a bustling metropolitan population has no use for such. In this they are mistaken. Those who work in the city's grime are the hungriest for a breath of the outdoors—the clean sunbathed outdoors where the trees are tall and straight, because the gases of blast furnaces do not reach them; where the wild birds call; the cow bells tinkle; the sands heap themselves before the wind in gentle undulations. (Many city folks, I'll grant you, are not aware that this is what they hunger for.)

I entreat you now, wherever you are, sit down and write a telegram—a letter—a card—anything to Hal O'Flaherty, Managing Editor of the *Chicago Daily News*. Tell him in no uncertain terms that he must resume Mr. Peattie's articles. Do this for the cause of nature.

Editors are like congressmen only in that they love to hear from their constituents. It shows them which way the wind is blowing. Let's hope a tornado blows off the prairie so that A Breath of Outdoors may resume.

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If you will look at a map of the United States showing our national parks and forests you will note that most of these areas are located in mountainous regions or in regions where nature has already provided abundant recreational land.

In many cases such land could never be used for anything else. In general what are known as agricultural states are left out of the picture. The Middle West has extremely few national parks, but the so-called mountainous or forest states to the east and the west are full of them.

Is it not time to think of a more even distribution of our parks? We don't have trailers, and even if we did many of us cannot spare the time it takes to travel to a national recreational area.

Of course it is much easier to make a park in land which nobody wants. But it is not at all impossible to do so in other places. Even in some of the best agricultural states there are millions of acres of marginal land, much of it hewn from the forest and ready to be reclaimed by the trees

as soon as man shall have moved to better parts. The fact that these marginal lands are in or near river valleys adds to their value as park lands.

Since everyone cannot go to the national parks, let us bring the national parks to the people.

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume V: January—December, 1938

Bluebirds in December! I have often seen bluebirds in central Illinois as late as Thanksgiving, but never before have I heard so many in this vicinity in December, as were reported in the last month of 1937.

The first half of the month was cold and wintry. A series of storms covered the trees and ground with a thick crust of ice, which remained unmelted for an unusually long time.

Then, as though relenting, the month became warmer and temperatures averaged above normal. A flicker and a robin were seen at my feeding stations throughout the month.

Shortly before Christmas a friend notified me that there was a flock of robins. On December 26th, a mild sunny day, I observed eight bluebirds feeding near a clump of red cedars not far from the Illinois River. The following day, Dec. 27th, at least sixteen bluebirds were seen near the Cabin by a neighbor who hastily notified me, but by the time I arrived at the spot they had gone, and a search failed to reveal them.

Two days later, however, Dec. 29th, a dark and foggy morning, I saw one bluebird close to the Cabin and on Dec. 31st four were plainly observed by me as they flew from trees to ground and back again in search of food, their blue wings shining in the sun.

Four bluebirds on the last day of the year! What does it mean? Were they delayed in their southward migration to the early winter? Or are they extending their winter range northward? Perhaps my friend T.E. Musselman, who maintains 500 nesting boxes for bluebirds near Quincy, Illinois, has flooded the regions with bluebirds.

These questions will have to await further observations and study before they can be answered. Will readers of NATURE NOTES please report any unusual occurrences this winter?

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Science has developed the automobile to its present day efficiency. But the human race has not yet developed to the point where its members are safe drivers. Science has developed the "Tommy gun," but some humans put it to bad use. Science has developed innumerable gadgets to make life easier in the home, in the office, in the factory. But life is by no means made happier thereby.

Now the American Association for the Advancement of Science proposes "an examination of the profound effects of science on society." It is high time! Let science lay off gadgets for a spell, and find out what it has done to humanity.

A nature fan in Wisconsin writes: "I'd like so much to know more about the Cabin. Is it a log cabin with a fireplace?"

This reminds me of many other inquiries I have received about the edge-of-the-woods office of NATURE NOTES. Many of you have already seen it. But for the benefit of those who haven't, I'll write a few words.

It is covered with shingles—white shingles—and has a fireplace made of brick. Incidentally, there is plenty of wood nearby for the fireplace. The only difficulty is in getting it cut to the right length. Just the other day a limb from a great oak came crashing down with a frightful noise. It missed the Cabin by a comfortable margin and—there was wood ready for the editorial axe!

I have a private axe which I try to keep keen and bright. Probably the next best thing to hiking, if one wishes the cobwebs swept away from the brain, is chopping. Just before reading a batch of dreary manuscripts, or writing this page, or correcting a galley proof, I go out and make a few chips fly. Presto, an extra supply of oxygen is sucked into the lungs, the blood races through the brain, the wood pile is replenished, and good-bye cobwebs. What dullness is then left in the "thinker" is indigenous and can't be helped.

The great limb that came crashing to earth in the second paragraph preceding afforded an interesting study in equilibrium. Being dead, it had been in the process of decaying for several seasons. Nature tried to prune it off by blowing up a gale now and then. The parent tree swayed and creaked, but the limb was tenacious. Finally, we had a cold rain that froze as it landed and coated everything heavily with ice. Even the added weight of the ice, which must have been considerable, couldn't break off our hero, the limb.

That day, a fox squirrel, fat from eating my hickory nuts, went out on the limb, which was familiar territory to him, though at the time it was slippery and called for careful going. Just as he reached a point about three quarters of the way out, nature's equilibrium suddenly was upset. The limb gave way: Its crash echoed and re-echoed through the empty woodlands.

It was some seconds before the fox squirrel could get himself stopped from sliding down the icy hillside. Then he tore for his nest, astonished at the thought of his favorite oak tree letting him down like that!

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The other day came two very helpful letters, curiously enough in the same mail. One from California, referring to the porcupine article in our January issue, suggested that there are at least one hundred persons who have a most satisfying thrill at the sight of a wild porcupine to one who wishes to destroy it by the poisoned cup method. Therefore, "Why not let NATURE NOTES be confined to the enjoyment of Nature and leave to other agencies a description of how to destroy wildlife?"

The other letter, from Virginia, states that there is no insect now known that eats such huge quantities of Japanese beetles and harmful caterpillars as the praying mantis. Mantis eggs should *not* therefore be used for fish food.

Why not put up dozens of bluebird houses this year and help add to the world's supply of beauty? This would be a fine project for scout troops, 4-H club members, and other groups. But disappointment will result if the boxes are not properly made and placed.

Dr. T.E. Musselman of Quincy, Illinois, has made a study of the domestic requirements of Madame Bluebird. He has evolved a simple box that may be made on a mass production basis, with very little trouble or expense. He has kindly offered to send, without charge, a copy of his mimeographed plans and instructions to any of our readers who will write him and enclose a three-cent stamp.

Dr. Musselman has placed hundreds of these boxes along roadsides and near his home. Last year about 92 percent of his little houses were used by bluebirds! Thus, if you follow directions carefully, the odds are in favor of your boxes being inhabited.

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Half way down the hillside and plainly visible through the Cabin Window is an army in green, white and gold. The bloodroots are on the march! Straight they stand, like soldiers at attention. They cover the slopes; there are thousands of them! Today each flower is wide open to the sun; there is not a petal fallen. Tonight it will rain and on the morrow those whitest of petals, which are the glory of the bloodroots, will be gone. After that the plants will be at work, maturing seed, and storing food, so that they may give the world a few golden hours of beauty in 1939.

Beauty is transient. If it were not transient it would not be beauty. The opportunity to enjoy it must be seized today. Tomorrow may be too late. Let me urge you to forget the cares of the work-a-day world for a few hours, at least. Sit on a hillside where wild flowers are blooming. Let your thoughts drift as they will.

Then you will understand why I urge you to do this.

Beauty is transient, but the ability to enjoy it is not. Go out now and find it. Spring is here!

We are indebted to Amy L. Look, a registered nurse, for the remarkable photograph of "chain lightning" which we present on the cover of this issue of NATURE NOTES.

Noting that a violent thundershower was approaching, about 10 o'clock one night in September, 1936, Miss Look set up her camera on a high porch of a hospital which overlooks the valley of the Illinois River. She opened the shutter, waited until the flash had occurred, then immediately closed it.

One can see that the bolt originates in a distant cloud. It then festoons itself and rises to another point in the heavens, possibly another cloud. Thence it travels earthward and is lost to

view as it strikes far below the observer. At several points it spirals toward the observer, thus recording on the film a number of distinct loops.

Now that the season of storms is here, why not try this interesting form of photography? Like Miss Look, you may be fortunate in recording some unusual flashes.

As this issue of NATURE NOTES was being put into type a vicious tornado came roaring across the prairielands within twenty miles of the Cabin. It laid waste to many fine farms and wiped the town of South Pekin, Illinois, off the map. I mean just that! The whole community was literally wiped away.

Never have I seen such widespread destruction since I viewed the city of Rhiems in France in '18. I have gathered material on this terrible phenomenon of Nature and may have more to say about it in a future issue.

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Those of use who have the opportunity of enjoying the woods and fields during this exquisite month of May should give some thought to the less fortunate who are hemmed in by the city streets and have no way of escape.

Some time ago a letter was received at the office of NATURE NOTES. It has no signature, no return address. It was postmarked Chicago, Illinois. We have decided to reproduce this letter in its entirety:

Mr. Editor,

I have seen your Nature Notes and can you tell me how I can teach my children to love nature. We live in a flat—4 stories up and can't see anything but a dirty court and have no money for car rides. I was a country girl and don't want my children to play in the street.

Thank you sir.

There is no doubt that in the large and busy metropolis of Chicago, and in other big cities from one end of the land to the other, there are many distressed mothers, each of whom is asking the selfsame question, "How can I teach my children to love nature?"

This mother's simple and direct question goes like an arrow to the heart of the matter. The answer calls for careful deliberation. Possibly you know the answer. Perhaps you have had the same problem to meet and have solved it. Perhaps you know of some agency or organization that is really doing good in the world and can be of great help in getting young city children started on the road to an appreciation of the wonder and beauties of nature.

If you have a suggestion that you believe would be helpful, please write it down and send it in to us. We believe that the answer to this question will be the answer to the problem of juvenile delinquency, to the problem of crime prevention, to other vexing social and sociological problems of the day. "How can I teach my children to love nature?"

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From all indications this has been a highly successful season for the robins, brown thrashers, bluebirds, starlings, wrens, rabbits, squirrels, and chipmunks of this locality. Around our office which is located, as many of you know, on the edge of the woods, swarm both old and young of these birds and mammals. The indigo buntings and wood thrushes, too, have youngsters about, but they keep themselves better hidden than the rest. I think there is a family of woodchucks somewhere about, for I see that a planting of beans has been nibbled almost to the ground.

Frequent rains, though they have spoiled many a picnic, have kept the ground well supplied with moisture. So vegetation is lush, flowers are plentiful and the harvests bid fair to be heavy.

Nature, it seems, knows not that men are in the throes of what's called a depression. Nor does she care.

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I have just been looking over my nature diary again, Here is one of my most valued possessions. If I should awaken to find the house ablaze tonight, after its human occupants were out, the first thing I'd rescue would be my shabby old notebooks! For in them I have kept records of all my field trips since the year 1907, when I wrote in a battered, copy-book hand. In them are dates of interesting things I've seen outdoors, the names of new plants and animals I've learned, bird list after bird list, and photograph after photograph.

My photographs, alas for those who are interested in human nature, are not of people standing in rows and trying not to look too foolish; but all manner of natural objects from diatoms to stuffed buffalo.

With the old dry plates of my early photographs, one had to remove a cap from the lens, and say "one. . two. . three . . four" very slowly, then wait a while for good measure and replace the cap. Today with super-sensitive films we click our views with efficient, high speed shutters.

The point is—are *you* keeping a nature diary? Will you some day have worn out old notebooks to help you relive your hikes, to keep you from forgetting how marvelous nature is?

If not, then the quicker you begin the better! Go out now, make some little observation and jot it down. Look through your snapshots and pick out some views of the mountains or of the sea, or just of the lilacs in your yard. Label them with date and locality, and write a sentence or two about each one. You'll have a good start. It's marvelous what a hobby this can become.

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Bird observations, in fact any kind of outdoor operations, have been made difficult this fall by the great cloud of mosquitos which has overspread this section of the country. Not only in swampy places is one attacked by the blood hungry insects, but on dry uplands, and in the centers of cities.

I was engrossed, the other afternoon, in holding my binoculars on a warbler in just a few minutes there were swarms of mosquitos all about me, and I received dozens of bites. Finally, I was forced to give up my efforts to identify the bird and had to beat a hasty retreat.

I'm afraid that field records from the Middle West will be scarce this fall. Of course, if the observer can have two assistants, one on each side, to shoo away the insects, he may be fortunate enough to make a few notes.

The duck shooting season opened October 15th, fifteen days earlier than last year, and my heart goes out to the hunters, lying in wait in the marshes. For it's in the marshes that our mosquitos grow to sizes 14 and 16. Those that conquered me were only about size 10.

Another unusual feature of this autumn is the summer temperature. Though the nights are cool, each day reminds one of July, with the mercury rising to points between eighty and ninety. No frost has, thus far, come to remind us that winter is on the way. Many trees, tired of waiting, are simply drying up their leaves and dropping them to the ground. Some of the maples however, and all of the sumacs have turned gorgeous, frost or no frost. And so is knocked into a cocked hat the popular theory that Jack Frost has something to do with painting the leaves in autumn.

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Just because winter is almost here is no reason to shut yourself indoors and sit by the fire. It's true that woodchucks and bears and certain other animals hibernate during the colder months of the year, but is that any reason why human beings should do the same?

I know a man, past eighty, who refuses to allow himself to become "house bound" at any season of the year. A cold winter's day is likely to see him out hiking along the road, or through the woods, looking at every bird he meets, examining the trees, looking for cocoons. The things he finds and brings home are marvelous to behold. The enthusiasm with which he recounts his daily experiences is inspiring, to say the least. And this man is, in spirit, younger than many people who are not half his age. He has a hobby—the outdoors. He fairly bubbles over with enthusiasm about it. And he won't be downed, even by cold weather.

Life's crowning glory is to grow old gracefully. It is my octogenarian friend's theory that those who sit by the fire have nothing to do but pity themselves. He says he can understand how little ailments become magnified in the mind until they are big in reality. He doesn't want to die a victim of his own thoughts. He wants to die with his boots on—his hiking boots.

There, my friends, is a lesson for middle age—middle age which considers itself beyond the lesson stage and yet often needs to learn things more than does youth.

All about me I see men of the middle years who are gradually giving up any outdoors activities they may have had, who are settling down in desk chairs and becoming soft and flabby. This is the easiest course to follow, no doubt, under our present system of living.

But anyone can see that it is not the safest way. Before it's too late get a hobby, beat old age! Go out and hike this winter, even if it takes an effort at first. Look for interesting things; photograph them; read about them; write them up for NATURE NOTES, and before you realize it, you'll be growing younger day by day.

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume VI: January—December, 1939

Are you sticking pretty close to a super-heated house or office these wintry days? Many of us are, you know. When you come to think of it, isn't it surprising how many people's "fresh air" in the wintertime is limited to a hop to the garage, a few steps from the curb to a friend's front door, or possibly a brief shopping tour down town? No wonder there is so much sickness abroad in the land. Are the so-called comforts and conveniences of modern life making us weaklings? Is science, having simplified the physical struggles of life, breeding a race of sub-men and sub-women?

There is small doubt in my mind that this is so. Science itself gradually is waking up to the fact. One year ago I said on this page:

Science has developed the automobile to its present day efficiency. But the human race has not yet developed to the point where its members are safe drivers. Science has developed the "Tommy gun," but some humans put it to bad use. Science has developed innumerable gadgets to make life easier in the home, in the office, in the factory. But life is by no means made happier thereby.

Now the American Association for the Advancement of Science proposes "an examination of the profound effects of science upon society." It is high time! Let science lay off gadgets for a spell, and find out what it has done to humanity.

Again, at its annual convention last month the A.A.A.S. discussed the matter, but little of a concrete nature was accomplished. It would seem that men of science realize that something must be done to prepare humanity for what science has to offer, but no one knows exactly how to go about it.

The problem can be divided into two parts. (1) What is the modern mode of life doing to our bodies? (2) What is it doing to our minds? The second is perhaps the most difficult to solve, since it includes our morals, our behavior, our religion, our general outlook on life.

In the meantime we can do much to prepare both our bodies and our minds for the softening ordeal to which the human organism is being subjected: First, cultivate a love for nature; second, get out regularly and observe nature. Those who have tried this simple and pleasant remedy say it's good medicine for what ails you.

A half dozen cardinals have elected to spend this winter close to the Cabin. I know a little bushy glen, less than a mile away, where I can count on finding at least a dozen cardinals, to say nothing of various sparrows, juncos, nuthatches, and others. A few miles in another direction, there is another place that cardinals adore and I have seen a flock of around two dozen of them

there. Every spot where there is a little stream, a few shrubs and protection from the winds has its quota. These birds are becoming more abundant year by year. If all were brought together in one flock, what a sight it would be! Especially if the sun were bright and snow covered everything.

Even as I write, a gorgeous male scolds and hops down to the snow where I have scattered some cracked corn. Now there comes a blue jay. Red, white and blue! I rise to watch them through the Cabin Window. They show no signs of fear. They, too, have their freedom in the United States. "O, say can you see. . . ?"

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The other evening your Editor, having gone to bed to nurse a bad cold, found himself with nothing better to do than to listen to the radio. God's ether was being cluttered with the usual rackets. A woman was sobbing pitifully in a grippi ng "drammer" of love. A machinegun-voiced man was delivering himself of a commercial announcement on how to get rid of pimples and skin rash. Another was telling an expectant world what kind of lipstick 98% of Hollywood uses. Thus around the dial. And all the cracks in between were filled with cheap music. We who live near the U.S. center of population get this stuff from all thirty-two points of the compass the minute we put up an aerial.

At last, after much exploring of the wave bands, I found something real good. It was one of those "true or false?" programs, advertising a shaving cream. I would be glad to pass on to you men the name of the cream, but I have completely forgotten it. You will recognize it when I say it melts that film of oil that surrounds each whisker so the water can enter. In a flash your beard becomes soft and limp and all you do is brush your razor across your face. Utopia, brothers, Utopia!

This program, which originated in the East, was designed to test the intellectual powers of several men and women contestants. And a very good test it was. One woman was asked, "Is it true or false that the cow catcher of a locomotive is for the purpose of supplying the dining car with fresh meat?" It was several seconds before she could think of the correct answer.

If only radio programs and magazine articles would go in for reasonable accuracy when they touch upon natural history, they would disturb the nature lover slightly less. In the radio program referred to above, a contestant was asked, "true or false: the mouse and the squirrel belong to the same family?" This contestant, who seemed to have the best fund of knowledge, answered correctly, "False," A bell was rung, and the contestant was very quickly put Out of the running for the twenty-five dollar prize. Thus is accurate knowledge penalized in this commercial day and age. The mouse and the squirrel both belong to the order of rodents, yes. But not to the same family. Look it up and see.

I clicked off the radio and sought solace in the *Reader's Digest*. There I found pleasure in an article on *Mephitis*, the Skunk, condensed from *The American Mercury* until I came to this:

It is usually in late April or in May, when the veined green spathes of skunk cabbage are thrusting up in marshy places, that the baby skunk is ushered into life. He is one of a

litter that may contain almost a dozen, and the place of his birth is most often a vault-chambered burrow in the frozen earth...

Then I flipped the pages to find a quiz on weather lore, written by a newspaper man. How many interesting things a trained meteorologist might learn from this quiz.

Altogether I had a miserable evening, but managed to pull through by reading a hymn of hate about a dictatorship. Nevertheless, I couldn't help wondering how much of that was inaccurate.

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Recently I had occasion to help in the clearing up of some level land near the edge of the woods. This piece had not been mown, grazed or burned over for about four years. In fact, it had been allowed to run wild. Nature had been given time to do with it as she wished. And she had practically had a riot.

As I raked, burned, and hacked at the brambles that had sprung up everywhere, I couldn't help thinking just a bit about this reforestation business. There on that piece of ground were wild shrubs in great numbers. There were sumacs and rough leaved dogwoods—in this region the advance agents of the forest. Then there were hop-trees, wahoos, beautiful hawthorns of various species, and those shrubs which bear the most fragrant of all the wild blossoms found in these parts—the wild crab.

Here and there among this natural growth of shrubbery one came to a husky young elm tree just getting a good start, a tiny white oak, or a hickory that the squirrels had planted. In all there were more than enough young trees to reforest this property. Soon they would have been standing above the shrubs that nursed them, and in not so many more years there would have been a forest where for a hundred years there had been none.

As I hacked I wondered. Why all the hullabaloo about reforestation? Why the millions being spent to bring back the woods, when all man has to do is sit down and wait?

Our home is at the edge of woodland. For most of my life I have been fighting to keep the woods at bay. Nature is bound and determined to have again what once was hers.

I am speaking, of course, of regions where there were forests in times past. In such regions soil and climate favor the re-establishment of trees. No doubt there are places where trees never grew and never will. Why, then, waste millions to forest these plains?

Restlessness, impatience, ceaseless activity—that is man. The ring of the axe; the fall of the forest monarch; prodigious effort spent to remove the stumps; failure to make the land pay; reluctance for a while to admit defeat; then millions for reforestation.

Meanwhile, where man stands aside the forest marches on!

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Anyone who has ever tried getting near enough to a fox to see it, let alone photograph it, will appreciate the flash light records from the home life of the desert kit fox by Russell Grater in this issue of NATURE NOTES.

Today there are hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of photographers in the United States. Camera manufacturing concerns are doing a rushing business. The common stock of the Eastman Kodak Co., for example, sells at a good price, even in times of depression. It is safe to say that if all the camera shutters that are snapped each day were brought together and released at the same instant, there would be a deafening and window-shattering detonation, And yet, with all this lens work, good photographs of wild animals going about the every-day activities of their lives are not as common as one would suppose.

There are still tremendous opportunities for fame, if not fortune, in the field of nature photography. Though many thousands of nature photographs have been published, the surface has merely been nicked. There are so many forms of living organisms and each one does so many different things that, to make adequate pictorial records of their lives, will require a deal of shutter snapping yet.

I must not, of course, call it "shutter snapping." That's not all there is to it by any manner of means. Behind every successful nature photograph lies planning, judgment, technical skill, patient waiting, physical inconvenience and perhaps danger. Climbing to a nest sixty or seventy feet from the ground when there is snow on the limbs and branches in order to photograph young great horned owls (see the article by Byrdna Woodley in this issue) is not the safest thing in the world. But the true nature lover does it gladly. Why? Because it's sport of the keenest kind.

The trophy you bring home is but the ephemeral etching of light upon a silver salt; yet it represents much more than does the limp and bleeding body brought back by the powder-and-shot hunter. And it's a plain case of eating your cake and having it. For all we know Grater's foxes and Woodley's owls, and all the other wild things that have been portrayed in NATURE NOTES are alive today, working out their destinies in nature's great plan.

Now let me ask you: Why not become a skillful photographic hunter? It requires more preparation than does mere gun barrel pointing, and so are the satisfactions vastly more.

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There are birds of many kinds about the Cabin as I write. Almost perfect weather conditions have sent songsters surging northward in a last minute rush to gain their summer houses. Warblers, many of which will not be with us long, are finding good picking among the oak blossoms. Baltimore orioles are gathering material for nests. Today I saw one pull strands from the twine with which the grapes are tied up. Crested flycatchers are hunting for snake skins to adorn their homes. I should imagine that snake skins are hard to find, now that snakes of all kinds are being killed off so rapidly.

Wood thrushes are no doubt building in secret glens and perhaps laying eggs by this time, but they take time morning and evening to serenade us with ringing music.

A Carolina wren sits on her eggs by our back porch. Meadowlarks don't whistle so much now, having treasure to guard somewhere in the grasses. The early builders are busy feeding nestlings. I know where there are baby bluebirds just hatched. I can show you hairy woodpeckers about half grown and young robins ready to spring out of the natal soup bowl and scold and furiously fan their wings.

So we have all stages of home development, from the late migrants, who are just thinking about nesting in the backs of their heads, to those accomplished facts, the fledgling robins with spotted breasts.

For the nature lover who likes to watch the birds' homemaking operations, and perhaps photograph them, it is a blessing that all birds don't go to homemaking at one and the same time.

It is a blessing, too, for the birds themselves. Suppose all parent birds were simultaneously abroad, scurrying for supplies to feed themselves and their hungry children. I doubt if the insect supply would hold out. Entomologists would be complaining that measuring worms had become extinct.

All this is one more example of the great "dovetailing" of nature. Throughout the long ages all trees and shrubs and herbs and lower plants as well as all mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and lower animals have found niches for themselves in the world. Among the plants: some like sunshine, some shade; some prefer one kind of soil, some another; some grow at one season, some at another; some rear themselves aloft, some remain near the ground; and so on.

Every species has found a place where, and a time when it can grow with the minimum of competition from others. Likewise all the members of the animal kingdom have distributed their activities through space and time. Those that could not dovetail themselves in with the others have become extinct. It is a tremendously complicated relationship, one which man is only beginning to perceive. Probably never will he be able to reach a full understanding of it all.

Man himself is part of the environment to which other living things must adjust themselves. By his activities he is sometimes able to swing the balance for or against a species. This in turn affects other species, until the reverberations may reach to the lowest of living things and even past them into the inanimate world.

Meanwhile a robin faithfully sits on her nest and gazes at me through the Cabin Window. She is merely doing her tiny bit as a part of a great plan which One has made and which we grope to understand.

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The August sun is notoriously hot in this part of the world. Here we keep out of its sight as much as possible, unless we want to get burned to a crisp; or unless, as I did the other day, we want to take a look at it and study its freckles.

Nineteen thirty-nine is a sunspot year. Astronomers have discovered that about every eleven years there occurs a maximum of terrific eruptions and violent “storms” on the surface of old Sol. These are visible to us as “spots.” They are really light spots, but they appear much darker than the rest of the sun. Sometimes a large one can be seen with the naked eye, if the sun is viewed through a dark enough glass. I was privileged to view it through a fairly large telescope.

Sure enough, there were numerous spots—more in fact, than I had ever before observed. There were large, single spots and groups of smaller ones. They were all arranged in a band parallel to the sun’s equator. Like every other celestial sight, this is a sight worth seeing.

I discovered also that these spots can be very easily photographed. A new occupation for you camera fans—snapping sun spots! If anyone would like to know how it’s done, perhaps I’ll write an article about it some day.

If you get hold of even a small telescope, provide a very dark filter over the lens, and turn it toward the August sun. The only difficulty, you will find, is that this kind of business can’t be carried on in the shade.

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The “Office Force,” which consists of Mrs. Editor and a number of little editors, insists that it’s time to come in and write an editorial for this issue.

I have just been scouring one of our state parks for ferns. Making a collection of the ferns of your state is a fascinating occupation. I can heartily recommend it to all nature lovers. Believe me, your observations will not be limited to ferns, but will also include a wide range of subjects, such as trees, wildflowers, reptiles, insects (especially gnats and mosquitos), birds, rocks, thunderstorms and, in fact, the whole of the vast outdoors.

If, perchance, your fern herbarium should contain a plant never before reported from a certain county or region, you will be helping to bring fern lists up to date. In doing this you will be helping the fern-lovers who come after.

Let me recommend fern collecting to ornithologists, especially. By now your bird lists for the year have been written up. Many young birds are out of the nest and you find yourself somewhat lacking in enthusiasm when it comes to learning the immature plumages of sparrows, warblers, wrens and vireos.

Why not switch to ferns? They are at the height of their season. Get a plant press and go after them. What makes a more beautiful specimen than a nicely mounted fern? A whole collection of them is a joy to behold.

But take only a frond or two unless the fern is an abundant one. Too many lovely kinds have already disappeared from these parts due to thoughtless fern diggers. And when you discover an enchanted spot where grows a rarity, speak not of it to friend unless—"Time tried and true, they bear your secret to the grave."

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How many dramatic events the nature lover can see!

My friends the chipmunks are becoming numerous 'round the Cabin. They sit on top of a retaining wall and eye me without fear as I move about inside. They come close to the doorway and fill their cheek pouches with cracked corn I scatter on the ground. They even venture inside the Cabin, now and then, progressing with little jerky motions, as if curious to see what manner of being stays there.

One morning, last month, I was walking through one of the wilder parts of the reservation, when a chipmunk—one of my friends, I'm sure—appeared almost at my feet and ran for cover toward a brush pile. Immediately there was a terrible commotion under the pile of brush. I could see a great thrashing about, but the movement was so rapid that my vision was blurred.

When things came to rest I saw the chipmunk, with legs outspread, lying limply in the coils of a thick-bodied black snake. I saw at once that it would be only a matter of a few minutes before the chipmunk was dead. Already it was gasping for breath and its eyes were becoming glazed.

My reaction to this sight consisted of a series of impulses. First, my journalistic instinct came to the fore. Should I make haste to the Cabin, secure my camera, and get an unusual photograph for the readers of NATURE NOTES? No doubt that would have entailed the death of the chipmunk. Next the scientific impulse appeared on top. How could a snake whose head appeared to be less than a quarter the diameter of the chipmunk's body swallow this catch? The scientist in me said, "Watch closely and see how this is done."

These thoughts went through my head in perhaps less than fifteen seconds. The final impulse was the one which made me act. I suppose it may be called humanitarian. Taking hold of the snake's tail, I pulled it out in the open. Even then it failed to uncoil itself from around the chipmunk. A vigorous jerk was required to make the predator release its prey.

After a few gasps the chipmunk was able to pick itself up and scamper to safety. The black snake slithered out of sight among the bushes.

Perhaps all drama is inside the beholder. At any rate, the above was an intensely dramatic moment!

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What of interest does November hold for the nature lover? Many, many things. Witch hazel is in bloom. Birds' nests which you never would have found last June, now stand revealed. The little fur bearing animals are scurrying about the woods preparing for winter. Those shrubs which attracted you last spring by their blossoms—can you identify them now by their twigs alone? Seeds of many kinds are ripe; a collection of various types makes an interesting and educational exhibit; some—bittersweet, virgin's bower, milkweed—are exceedingly decorative.

Then there are the fungi. I made the discovery one year that November was a good time to learn some of the mushrooms. Fall rains had promoted their growth and the woods and fields were full of them. In a few minutes' walk I collected eight kinds, all in their prime. There were others, too, which I later found.

Don't let the frosty mornings of winter discourage you. Get out and hike. You will find many things!

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The other day, while hiking up a little stream valley six or seven miles from the Cabin, I heard once more the old familiar cry of the prairie chicken. I used to hear this call right near home in years past, but have not heard it for perhaps a decade. One reason may be that the neighborhood is becoming more populous and the chickens have been driven further out.

Let us hope that this rare bird is holding its own in the country as a whole.

I have been practicing what I preach. We have been having a run of mild, sunny weather with the ground snowless and free of mud. On December 15th, the temperature here at the Cabin was the same as at Jacksonville, Florida. I have taken advantage of this fine weather to make many field trips with net and bucket. Five aquaria have been stocked with little fish and various odd and ungainly water creatures which I propose to study when the weather is not so enticing.

If you have never looked at Spirogyra through a microscope, you should manage to do so somehow. In ponds and streams Spirogyra is a rather unattractive mass of green which often clogs your net and causes trouble in other ways. But put it under the low power. Then it becomes interwoven strands made of long narrow cells placed end to end. Inside the cells are bright green ribbons wound in regular spirals, with here and there a green dot. No wonder some of the water living creatures subsist on it. It looks good enough to eat!

This is but one example of nature's beauty that is revealed to us by the microscope. Everywhere we turn we can find things that have unsuspected charm when placed on the glass slide. In addition to the beauty we can see about us, there is a minute world which man's eye cannot perceive, unless aided by powerful lenses.

Not all of this minute world is beautiful, perhaps, but it is full of never ending interest. Many of the little one-celled animals, for instance, can hardly be called beautiful, but the nature lover will sit for hours watching their antics as they swim around in a drop of water. And such things can be collected in the dead of winter and observed in a warm laboratory.

Through the Cabin Window

Volume VII: January—December, 1940

As faithful subscribers of NATURE NOTES know, our office is in a small building located on the edge of the woods, very close to nature. This, we believe, keeps us in constant touch with things outdoors.

We can watch the chickadees and nuthatches at our feeding stations; we can see the squirrels scampering along the limbs of the great oaks; we can follow the hawk as he soars above the hills; and we can even occasionally catch a glimpse of “brer fox” as he investigates the possibilities of making a meal of some fat hen.

Is this not an appropriate setting for the offices of a magazine that endeavors to bring you first-hand knowledge of nature? We think it is.

Of course, when the temperature drops to fifteen or more degrees below zero, as it has of late, we are all but put out of commission. And when the snow piles up across our lane in knee-deep windrows we have more difficulties to overcome.

But such troubles as these are minute in comparison to the troubles of the birds which must stay outside all day and all night.

Are *you* feeding them? Even the hardy winter birds can't help but suffer, especially when snow and ice covers their natural foods.

Their suffering is not so much due to the low temperatures, as to the difficulty of finding food. Put out chunks of suet and scatter baby chick feed or canary seed mixtures on the ground. The birds will reward you by coming around in large numbers. This may even attract some rare bird that you would not otherwise see about the place.

Thus there is a mutual benefit. The birds find readily available provisions; you learn to know them better.

Don't, though, do as some do. Some fail to go outside and replenish supplies when the weather is bad. If you do this, you will be failing your friends when they most need your help.

Our series of snows and cold snaps seems to have greatly reduced the attendance at our feeding stations around the Cabin. Earlier in the winter we had dozens of birds about at all times. Chickadees, tufted titmice, cardinals, juncos, hairy and downy woodpeckers, white breasted nuthatches, blue jays seemed to be lining up awaiting their turns. Sometimes, too, we saw a Carolina wren near-by.

But now we have fewer visitors. We can only hope that our “customers” have not perished, but have gone farther south.

There is another possibility which may account for our decreased patronage. Perhaps our human neighbors have gone into competition with us and have set up feeding stations just as we have.

In that case we shall rejoice. We lay no claim to a monopoly on this winter beauty, but are glad to share it with all who are interested enough to help.

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Tracks in the snow! Isn't that something to make your heart beat faster? It suggests the nice fresh air of a winter's day; sun reflecting from a white blanket that covers field and dell; a tramp through the copses in breeches and boots; the exhilarating freedom of the open country.

The other evening it snowed at dusk. It was not a very heavy snow—just enough to cover everything with a clean, white sheet upon which things that were written could be easily read.

Next morning before me lay an open record of the doings of the night. No wild thing, no matter how timid, could have so much as set foot outside its lair without leaving a record in the snow. To the person who will take a few minutes at such a time to see and to learn, many things that happened in the night will be as plain as day.

I did not have to search for cottontail tracks. They were everywhere. They were collected in runways; they were scattered broadcast across the orchard.

Wherever several bushes grew close enough together to impede the swoop of owls were multitudes of rabbit tracks. I could see here where a bunny had hopped leisurely along, putting his tracks so close together that they almost touched each other. There he had run madly toward the woods, startled perhaps by a shadow darker than the sky. For his leaps were long, and his landings few and far between.

There were dog tracks, too; great hungry hounds whose feet pressed deep. Anyone who has ever been familiar with a dog and has observed the rough, thick pads of the feet will know a dog's track at a glance. It cannot be mistaken for the track of anything else, except perhaps for that of a wolf. There are four toes on each foot and on each toe a claw, that leaves its imprint in the snow.

Past the Cabin had prowled a cat. What was pussy after? A hiding junco possibly, or a white-footed mouse. She had walked evenly and carefully, placing the hind feet neatly in the tracks of the forepaws. Claws she must have had, as I know from experience with cats, yet she kept them so well sheathed that not a ghost of a mark did they make in the snow!

Another track came out of the woods and crossed the orchard—it was the unmistakable trail of a skunk. Now, I have not seen a skunk about the place in years. In fact, I didn't know any

were left in the vicinity. But there it was—the telltale record written in plain language across the page of night.

Another four-footed visitor came almost to our door, then veered aside and walked in straight lines down the lane. I have had dealings with him of late. But for him my hens would not be bereaved of sisters who by now would be laying eggs, or of brothers whose honorable destiny would have been the kettle. This fifth visitor was The Fox—The Fox of Spooky Hollow. His tracks I know, for they show claws like a dog’s but the pads are not as thick and heavy. Like a cat, The Fox places his hind feet exactly in the tracks of the fore ones. Could any signature be plainer? To me his trail reads “The Fox, The Fox, The Fox,” wherever he has passed. I’ll outwit him yet, the blackguard!

Those were the tracks of the night... The tracks of the morning were there too. Squirrels had come down from trees and had dashed for devious destinations. Juncos had hopped about the weed stalks, keeping their feet side by side, as if they were little mechanical toys. A bevy of quail had dotted the snow all around my ground feeding station.

Thus the record was written. It ran on and on throughout the day. By nightfall the trail of a nature lover wound all about the place and filled in most of the blank spaces.

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Spring is not spring without at least one robin scolding about the place. One does not really get into the spirit of the thing until this good old American bird is back again.

This year our robins were unusually late. A scattered few had remained in the region until the cold of midJanuary then they dropped completely out of sight.

As March approached, we looked for them again, but in vain. We saw a meadowlark, and heard a killdeer or two. A bluebird dropped out of the sky and went through the apartments we have prepared for its kind. But there were no robins.

Then it became a matter of serious concern. I began to take field trips especially to find robins. I looked in dozens of likely places. There were no robins—I would swear it—within ten miles of the Cabin.

Not until the middle of March did we see one. Then it remained only a few minutes and was gone. But the next day another came, and the day following there were two.

Spring may now officially begin. Hepaticas may open in the woods. Fox sparrows and other migrants may pass through our country on their way northward. The rains may come. Life may begin to surge. The robins are with us once more!

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Thoughts while sitting on a white oak log:

When you are returning from a long hike a log is a convenient thing. Perhaps that is why they are put in the woods—to rest on for a spell. How soothing it is to relax and let your thoughts ramble. They do not have to be photographed. At any rate they cannot be. . . . Look through the silent trees. How calm they seem. . . . God made them that way. What is the use of all this modern hustle, anyway? I am half way up a hillside, The hills are not everlasting. Little gullies are forming. The water is taking them away. . . . In the distance is the tinkle of a cow bell. The brook makes sweet music below me, to the right and to the left. Through the feathery branches of a clump of second-growth, which is just getting tiny leaves, I see the beautifully scaled trunk of a living white oak. To the right of me a woodpecker has made a hole in a dead stump. Overhead, I hear the watery notes of a cowbird. I feel the electricity of nature going through me, being in contact with this great oak log, which is in contact with the earth. . . . Suddenly, from a distant highway can be heard the angry bark of an auto horn as some impatient motorist honks and honks for the right-of-way. What a discordant note! In contrast, there is the bubbling song of a ruby-throated kinglet close by... . The trees appear to be idle but they are not. They are really working for man's good. The season's growth is starting and by autumn there will be thousands more board-feet of timber in the woods. I hear the cheerful trill of a field sparrow. Just beyond the living white oak there is a healthy, youthful black oak. Their trunks make a beautiful contrast. . . . My dog lies on the log beside me, looks into my eyes and whines to be off. Strange how well man and dog can come to understand each other. I show no signs of going and he lies down in the leaves at the side of the log. I stand up and he is all eagerness. But I am not quite ready to go, and he whines again. It's a good-natured whine, not a whiny one. . . . A flicker pipes up almost overhead. A nuthatch flushes an insect from a tree limb. He goes after it flycatcher fashion—and gets it. That's something I've never seen before. Some woodpecker has discovered that a broken-off tree on the opposite slope makes a wonderful sounding board. He is making the valley ring. Music of the sweetest kind to a female of his species. . . . Little plants have found footholds on this old log on which I sit. It is beginning to crumble. In a few years it will be soil again, like everything in nature. It is the whole tree lying there. It seems to have lived its hundreds of years in vain. But has it? At least its body is now host to many kinds of living things and it will make soil for future flowers. Good soil, and perhaps a rare blossom that will grow there will be a valuable inspiration to some man or woman. An inspired leader of men is worth a thousand white oaks. A man who could show the world the peacefulness of the woods would be worth a million. . . . And just below me is one of my secrets of the woods—a clump of lady-slippers. They are not in bloom yet. They are hurrying to make growth before the trees shall shade them with their leaves. . . . It is time to go home. My dog is on the way. From far over the ridge, I hear the call to dinner. The body must now be fed, the soul having already eaten.

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Senator Scott Lucas of Illinois, has introduced into Congress bill No. S3611 which, if made into a law, would legalize the baiting of waterfowl.

By baiting of waterfowl is meant the scattering of corn or other attractive food over the waters where hunting is permitted. This attracts ducks in large numbers and they may then easily be slaughtered by hunters, who remain in ambush on the shore. Baiting is, at present, outlawed by Federal statute and many arrests for violation have been made in the past. This federal law is one of the factors which is helping the wild ducks to re-establish themselves on our waterways.

Senator Lucas lives at Havana, which is located on the Illinois River in splendid duck-hunting country. In the river bottoms are marshes and small lakes, which are frequented by hundreds of thousands of ducks of many species during the spring and fall migrations.

No doubt, Senator Lucas has many constituents who are ardent duck hunters and who have pressed him to do what he can to legalize baiting. Hunting has been somewhat hampered of late years owing to a recent discovery that was made by the ducks themselves, Corn fields along the river, furnish oftentimes better food and more of it, than the river itself.

Each day in the fall, the ducks leave the water and repair to the corn fields, often at a considerable distance from the river. Owing to the introduction of the mechanical corn picker, much corn is dropped on the ground. Many hunters, therefore, feel that they should be allowed to bait in order to be able to compete with the corn picker.

It is the opinion of your Editor that even Mr. Lucas, himself, hasn't much hope for the passage of bill S3611. Certainly both Federal and State game management agents are dead set against it. Moreover, it would be necessary to win a majority of the forty-eight states before this bill could be passed. Audubon societies, nature groups, and other organizations of conservationists are crusading against it. We venture to forecast, therefore, that S3611 is doomed to defeat.

I have just returned from a trip to Havana, Senator Lucas' bailiwick, where I have talked to Federal and State men. I have observed the ducks themselves in great numbers and I have seen some of the results of these men's earnest efforts to allow them to increase so that no species of duck shall become extinct.

A short distance north of Havana is located the new Federal Chautauqua Game Refuge, on which thousands of ducks and other migratory waterfowl are now resting, as they pass northward to their breeding grounds.

I have talked also to duck hunters; both the kind who believe in taking all the game they can get now, regardless of what the future may hold; and the kind who are willing to stop with only their share, allowing future generations to harvest abundant crops of ducks. It is my firm belief that sentiment, even in such rock-ribbed duck hunting centers as the Illinois River country, is overwhelmingly against the baiting of ducks.

This, of course, is a splendid showing that conservation societies, the Government men, the State men all who are helping the ducks, are winning a fair fought battle.

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Is the woodcock tribe once more increasing in Illinois? For many years, I have been trying to find a nest. Then, this spring I have seen and photographed two nests with eggs and have heard the mysterious nuptial song of the bird as it soared in the air several evenings in April.

Now comes a letter from Marie Raecke, Nues Center, Illinois (near Chicago). She writes, under date of April 25, 1940:

I want to tell you about a strange bird that's nesting on the grounds of our high school, not far from the baseball diamond, with men working all around her. She has all the earmarks of the Woodcock, a long bill, short neck and tail, large eyes, the coloring blends with the dry leaves and grass of her crude nest—the lower part of her body is light as far as I could see—she did not get off her nest, though three of us stood within five feet of her and we did not want to disturb her.

I was told there were four eggs the size of bantam eggs, one of these eggs is pushed somewhat out of the nest. One of the workmen put the egg back into the nest while the hen was gone, but she pushed it out again when she returned. She doesn't seem to leave the nest except when the men have to work very close—and they try not to disturb her.

I was told that one of the men expressed a desire to keep one of the chicks when they are hatched, which would be too bad as he surely wouldn't know how to care for it. I have a small colored picture in one of my bird books of the Woodcock which fits this bird exactly.

Another thing—there is no water near where this hen is nesting.

I wonder why she picked this site for her nest? I just hope she'll be able to raise her family and will hie herself to safer hunting grounds.

Notice that the workmen “try not to disturb her,” a most encouraging sign.

I would be very glad to hear from others who have had recent experiences with this odd and interesting bird.

Another interesting letter has just come in from Dagny Banker of Walker, Minnesota—

Well, nature lovers are queer people, aren't they? They do the silliest things: They go tramping in mud through pouring rain, wearing disreputable old hats and mud covered shoes. Then they scramble into ditches full of water in order to make snapshots of some fool thing that takes their fancy. All of them waste time. A woman nature lover is apt to leave off dishwashing in the middle and rush out of doors. There she stands gazing, as if enraptured, at—of all things—nothing but an old sparrow!

Other people know that birds fly and that fishes swim, but see no reason for making such a to-do about it, Why not take nature for granted and let it go at that? They do not know what an infinite fellowship she has to offer those who will enter into it. They have no idea of what a source of delight and inspiration she is to those who have the eyes to see, ears to hear, and minds to grasp some of her beauty, her power, her wisdom.

Let us “queer people,” therefore, be thankful that there are places where we may foregather to find understanding and the warmth of human companionship. NATURE NOTES provides such a place. Long may it live!

Yes, it may be queer to do the above things. On the other hand, it may be queer to dull the senses with alcohol and struggle around on a waxed floor until dawn. After all, who shall decide?

* * * * *

The last several years have been apparently good years for bluebirds, but 1940 seems to be a bad one. Reports received by us, indicate that bluebirds in this section of the country are reduced in numbers or entirely missing in their accustomed haunts. We hope that this is the low point in the bluebird cycle and that they will begin to show an increase again.

We would like to have reports from our readers, wherever they may be, in regard to their first-hand experiences with wild life. You may not think your observations amount to much, but if they are first-hand and accurately recorded, they may supply just the information needed for a more complete understanding of the habits of some species. We use wild life in its broadest sense, meaning any kind of wild creature or plant. Those who are interested in geology, mineralogy, astronomy and other forms of inanimate nature, should not neglect to send in reports also. We feel that we have had too little material in NATURE NOTES of an inanimate nature.

The warbler season this past spring, has been especially productive of new records. About the Cabin have flitted and sung, many thousands of these brightly colored birds on their way northward. In fact, we were kept busy running out of doors when we heard some song with which we were not familiar. We fear that our inside office work suffered to some extent, but our knowledge of the warblers and their songs has been greatly enriched.

The usual number of new species of moths, beetles, bugs and other insects have come to the Cabin asking to be collected. In truth, there are many advantages of having the offices of a nature publication almost in the woods.

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Tons of rocks and minerals will be picked up in small pieces by tourists, put on the car floor, and taken home because they are attractive or unusual specimens. Insects will be collected. Plants will be pressed. Wonderful shells will be picked up on the seashore. Odd bits of this and scraps of that will be taken home as souvenirs of nature and the trip, this summer. But how many of all these thousands of specimens, that the touring public will collect, will ever have any kind of label attached to them? My answer is: "Very, very few."

Recently, I have been going over hundreds of specimens of rocks and minerals which have been collected as described above. On one piece only can I find any semblance of a locality or a date. On a piece of agatized wood there has been written in characters which are now scarcely legible, "Sioux Falls, July, 1898." How much more interesting, how much more instructive this collection would be if it were known where and when each piece was collected.

Specialists, at any time, can determine the kind of specimen it is, especially if they know the locality; but no one but the collector can tell certainly where it came from, or when, and that information is soon forgotten.

So I implore you, whatever you collect this summer and take home, put a durable label on it in some way.

Maybe you don't know just what the thing is. That can be figured out later. Whatever you do, put the date and the locality in indelible characters upon it!

* * * * *

Mary Livingston Sedgwick

Perhaps a man is not really grown up until he has lost his Mother. On June twenty-ninth, the Editor suffered such a loss.

She who gave him life, who taught him honesty, who sacrificed for his well-being, who excused his failures and rejoiced in his little successes has gone to her great reward, which will be great.

To the birds and the trees and to all of God's nature, the Editor has come with his sorrow. Here he finds again a haven, a comfort, and a joy.

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About this time of year students everywhere are busily engaged in pulling apart picked grasshoppers and dissecting dead bull-frogs in order to gain credits in biology courses. Oh, I suppose these are harmless enough occupations—as far as the students are concerned—and once in a while somebody learns something.

The trouble with the whole procedure is that to most of the citizens who grow from these students *bullfrog* means formalin jar and not peaceful watery places where acres of floating lily-pads are bordered by marsh ferns and cardinal flowers. *Grasshopper* means femur and tibia and not sunny meadows dotted with Queen Ann's lace.

Just here is where NATURE NOTES steps in. We aim to supplement the pulling apart of grasshoppers with articles and departments by people who actually spend much time afield and who know now to use all the senses with which they were endowed by nature.

To be consistent with this first-hand idea, we have located the office of NATURE NOTES in the Cabin on the very edge of the woods where we can keep in touch with our subject, to say the least. A gathering of hickory nuts which we had planned to enjoy on cold evenings before the Cabin fireplace were all carried off by the chipmunks which share the premises. I can see one of the rascals now, sunning himself beside his hole in the ground. He looks pleased with himself.

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Nature with her gentle breezes and azure skies is forever enticing me outside. When the weather is sparkling, I feel I must be out a-learning. Life is short and time goes on; so hurry afield!

Pleasant days, whenever they come, are hard to resist. It is easy for me to persuade myself that, in order to advance my knowledge of my business I should be outdoors with eyes and ears wide open.

But now that the November rains have set in, I am not so easily persuaded. For the November rains are even more unattractive than those of March. At least in March one can sense the gestation of a new season. In November all hope has faded.

But let it not for one moment be supposed that all chances of field trips have gone with November. Good winter days will come and the student of nature will be permitted to learn many things. A catalog of the interesting things to be seen in Winter would be interminable. Let me just point out a few.

Rock outcrop. There is no question that the geologist's field work is facilitated by winter. The deciduous leaves are gone. He can see farther and find his outcrops easier. Because many outcrops are laid bare by the action of streams, he must often get across the stream. In winter he simply walks across.

Birds. Maybe the birds do all move southward in wintertime. But wherever you are, the chances are excellent that you are south of somewhere. So you will have birds. If you are a beginning ornithologist, winter is a favorable season for you. You can learn the good old standbys without the danger of being thrown into a dither of excitement by the flash of a scarlet tanager.

Mammals. A few mammals hibernate, but even these may be caught outside in balmy weather. Certainly, after a fresh fall of snow, no animal can set foot outside without leaving a record for you to read.

Trees and Shrubs. The evergreens are there as big as life. The others are somewhat immodestly naked but you can come to know them better. In winter you can see the forest in spite of the trees. There are keys to the twigs and winter buds which will help you identify your friends, in case you don't recognize them by the bark.

Insects. Oh yes, there are insects in winter too. Fortunately the flies and mosquitos are mostly gone, but you can find many others. Break the ice of ponds to find water insects. Look for certain kinds in the snow. Cocoons show up and can be brought indoors and watched for what comes out. Pry into crannies to find out whether they spend the winter as eggs, larvae, pupae, or adults.

Water Life. While you have a frozen pond opened up, make some passes around with a water net. What you'll collect will be your own surprise. Besides tin cans you may get minnows, baby fishes, crustaceans, planarians, and other things too numerous to mention, Take a quart of the water home, let it stand in a warm room and then examine a drop of it under a microscope. You may be astounded at what you see.

Stars. Of course winter is good to the astronomer. It makes the air clearer (unless they burn soft coal in your town) and it seems to bring the constellations and planets right down to earth. It also brings to view a different assortment of stars. The heavens are never so close to us as on a cold night in Winter,

This list could be lengthened, but I am leaving that for you to do. Choose your subject this winter, then go after it for all you are worth.

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume VIII: January—December, 1941

Many times in the past I have urged you hikers to make field notes and file them for future reference.

Every now and then I receive a letter asking me what system I use in keeping field notes. That is of course a fair question. I can explain my system, but I do not guarantee that it will fall in with your requirements. It is my belief that each individual should evolve a system to his or her liking. If you have notes taken on all manner of scraps of paper and filed away in all manner of places, I think you'll agree with me that a little brain work right now will save trouble in the future.

Well, here's my system, for what it's worth. There can be obtained at stationery counters 3-ring binders known as "price books" that measure approximately 6 x 8¼ inches. You can buy these books with genuine leather covers, if you want to; mine came from the great Kresge collection of odds and ends. One of these books holds all the notes and photographs I ordinarily make in a year. Therefore I put on the spine of each a sticker reading "1886" or "1941" as the case may be.

The paper for these books measures 5 x 7¾ inches with rounded corners. Right here is where economy means paying more. I used to buy cheap paper, a lot for a dime. But I find that when it is ten years old this cheap paper is yellow and brittle. This does very nicely for temporary notes, but for the other kind I buy crisp rag paper which sets me back half a dollar for a small packet. However the pages are thin and there are quite a number of them. Moreover, if you are a copious note taker, you can get more of these thin pages into each book.

I hope you don't imagine that I carry a ring binder on each field trip. There is no need of that. A few loose pages can be carried along in a number of ways. The way I have found most convenient is this: I had made a flexible-covered binder, very little bigger than the pages themselves, with a clamp *at the top* for holding pages. This slips nicely into a coat pocket, or if rolled up, into almost any pocket.

I like to take notes in waterproof ink. If you use a pencil, don't use a soft one or your notes will smear badly in your pocket and sometimes they become unreadable. Make sure the date is on each page.

You will now begin to see how easy it is to take notes in the field, then bring them home and file them in the proper place. Mine happen to be filed chronologically. You may wish to file

them under subject heads. It's true that where the trip has been strenuous the pages are often frayed, but that in itself is an eloquent field note.

Sketches may be made directly on your note paper, or on drawing paper cut to size and punched. Photographs are most effective when enlarged, cut to the 5 x 7¾ size and punched to fit the rings. Be sure to write on the back of each photograph all the data you will ever need such as title, date, place, kind of film, people in the picture and so on. If you neglect this you'll be wondering, a year from now, what it's all about.

Those who really go in for photography will want to have, in addition, some of the more technical data in regard to the making, developing and printing of the picture. For one reason or another I often want to make duplicates of some of my prints and it is convenient to have on them the kind of enlarging paper used, degree of enlargement and exposure time.

There are other things besides notes, sketches, and photographs that may be filed neatly away in your little shelf of nature note books: clippings, an occasional pressed leaf or blossom that struck you as unusual or attractive, autographs of others on the trip, ideas, letters from fellow naturalists. Take it from one who knows: during a long period of years your note books will gradually become valued possessions.

I am writing about this because I have received many inquiries, and because winter is a good time to get started. Whatever system you use, choose it carefully and stick to it. This will save you a vast amount of trouble later on.

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Two Worlds

Under the bleak hillsides there are hosts of living things ready to burst into life. I sometimes marvel at this fact. The snow covers the ground. Trees bend in the wind. It is cold. Aside from a squirrel and a brave little chickadee or two, everything, apparently, is dead.

But there are living stocks of orchids and wild ginger, hepaticas and maidenhair. Within a few short weeks the trees will have new leaves, warblers will be filling the glens with music, bees will be droning from flower to flower, the air will be soft and warm.

What a contrast! Here are two worlds as far apart as the stars: the world of winter and the world of spring. We who inhabit these worlds need not migrate from one to the other; Time brings them in review before us. We must wait.

The Fourth Dimension

Time is a force of nature. It is a "fourth dimension" that must of necessity enter into our plans and calculations. Time is our friend as well as our master.

For one thing, it brings us back to the beginning of the movie, back to another spring season that we can watch. Let us try to catch some of the action we missed when we saw this fascinating movie before.

Time, moreover, gives us understanding, more capacity to enjoy nature. If you feel that time is your enemy, get busy this spring. Step outdoors into a richer, more contented life. There is no time to lose.

Little Mammal

In January I found a little furry creature drowned in a bucket of water that was left standing in the Cabin. With the ponds and streams securely locked in ice, this little animal had sought a drink of water, and had fallen in.

When wet and bedraggled, mammals do not look at all like themselves. I gazed at this little creature for many minutes without being able to identify it. At the end of that time I was almost ready to resign all claims to a knowledge of nature lore. It was nine inches long including its tail, and weighed less than 2½ ounces. In color it was grayish and brownish. The possibility of its being a rat was ruled out by the fact that the tail was covered with fur. I was sure that it was nothing that I had ever held in my hands before.

Not until I had put it by the stove and dried out its coat did the truth dawn upon me. Then I saw that it was a flying squirrel. It never occurred to me to ask how flying squirrels secure water in the wintertime. Perhaps they are hard pressed to find it.

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Life on a Moraine

If I ever find myself with a free week-end, I intend to write a book about the above title. Many are the good tales I could tell of cars stuck in the snow, in the mud, and just stuck; of city people coming out to see us and expecting all the comforts of the pavement; of what happens when the frost is going out of the ground in March and why.

Geologists tell us that our abode is on a moraine. Many years ago, it seems, a big glacier covered this part of the earth. For some reason or other the sun got hotter and said to the glacier, "Halt!" and it halted. Then the sun said, "Melt!" and it melted. Naturally it had to drop all the pebbles, boulders, mud, and loess it was carrying. We live on the heap. If there were any gold nuggets in this mess they have been picked up long ago. I guess the boulders have been carted away for rock gardens. But the mud is still here.

The Muds of March

Summertime mud is not so bad. It has a certain regimentation to it. But March Mud, with a layer of frozen ground beneath it and snow or rain mixed with it, is a good deal like pancake batter in consistency. And it would very likely bake up into super-excellent mud pies, but I have never investigated this angle. However, it is not relished even by the earthworms.

That great labor-making invention, the automobile, is no match for the Muds of March. I have seen cars that could boast 120 and over horsepower under their hoods wallow right down

on their bellies with pitiful expressions. The more horsepower the less they get anywhere. I have seen wreckers that came to the rescue so badly mired that wreckers had to come and rescue the wreckers. And so on.

Oh well, this only lasts for a few days each March. Morainal life is really beautiful in April, May and June. If I write sordidly now, it's only because I'm stuck in the mud.

Moses and the Stuffed Lions

In our biggest and best town, New York City, the commissioner of parks, one Moses, has sent in a report to the Mayor about the town's museums, zoos, botanical gardens, aquariums and notorious places of that nature, both public and private.

This report is said to be unasked-for and certainly it is uncalled-for. In it the commissioner is hard on these helpful institutions. He vents his spleen, so say the papers, on the motives and character of the founders; on the aims and ideals of the museums; on the present management; and on the institutions as they stand—grounds, walls and roof.

In doing so, Mr. Moses is preparing for himself a tomb in Oblivion. Yesterday the fight of the Library was uphill. Those who opposed it—who were they? Today the Museum is struggling upward in towns much smaller than New York. It will reach the top some time.

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Fair and Warmer (?)

The forecast was for rain and colder. But I sat on the hillside hatless and coatless, soaking up the spring sunshine. April, the gypsy, dotes on being perverse.

I was gazing at an especially luscious clump of hepatica blossoms, trying to describe them. But, as usual, I found language inadequate. "Tomorrow, I must take a color-photo of them," I said to myself, "fetching equipment now would entail a hill-climb. And that's entirely too much work to do in the first really pleasant weather."

Next day: "Fair," said the hard working weatherman. "Really?" said Gypsy April. It rained.

Outcrops

The Illinois State Museum at Springfield publishes a monthly bulletin, called "The Living Museum," which points out each month some of the museum's interesting exhibits that are available to anyone who cares to go and see.

The editor of this interesting publication is Virginia S. Eifert who has written much on nature lore. (We can't refrain from noting in passing that several of Mrs. Eifert's articles have appeared in NATURE NOTES.)

In a recent issue of "The Living Museum" there was a word picture of Starved Rock as it appears in wintertime. People from near and far are familiar with Starved Rock State Park which extends for miles along the Illinois River, in LaSalle County, Illinois. The park appeals to lovers

of the beautiful because of its rugged scenery; it appeals to the historian because of the legends that have come down to us from the Indians and from the White men of earlier days; it appeals to the botanist because of its dripping ledges covered with ferns of many species, its rare flowers, its gnarled pines and cedars that are relics of times past; the park appeals to the geologist because of its outcroppings of St. Peter sandstone, caused by a tremendous prehistoric heaving deep down in the breast of the earth, which appears to have pushed the strata upward. These people see the park in the smiling summertime.

But someone saw it when the snow was knee-deep over the trails; when the air was clear and cold, when the ledges were slick with ice. This person, feeling a kinship with nature, must have paused and written with cold fingers a word picture of Starved Rock as it is in winter. A bit later this word-picture appeared, unsigned, in "The Living Museum." I reprinted it word-for-word in the January, 1941, issue of NATURE NOTES.

Meanwhile Poet Edgar Lee Masters, of Spoon River Anthology fame, read the sketch and with it in hand wrote a beautiful poem of ten stanzas which he titled "Starved Rock in Winter." Runs the prose:

...The colors of iron in the water, and the reflection of the sky, and the green pines above, bring out an illusion of rainbow beauty in the ice, It is pale green; it is pale yellow; it is white; it is russet, with icicles of tea-color, lavender, a suggestion of blue, and brown, and red. The great mass hangs against brown walls upholstered with pale green-white lichen powder and green liverworts.

Says the poem:

Water has dripped and frozen, and many hues
Merge in the icicles, russet, blue, and green;
They hang against the Rock's brown walls, between
The lichens, liverworts, their colors fuse
Into a rainbow splendor, while the stream
Takes the reflections of the sky, combines
Its iron color with the verdant pines...

The moral of my little tale is: Nature's outcrops invariably cause the poet in man's or woman's soul to crop out; and, practicing poets sometimes depend on nature-lovers when the weather is cold.

* * * * *

Interruptions

Each year when the calendar leaf entitled "May" comes near the surface, I work like the deuce in the hope that I can get everything I have to do done. For it has always been my dream that I could spend May outdoors with notebook, and camera, and binoculars, and two good legs, and at least that number of eyes and ears.

But it's always a vain hope. May catches me with things undone, letters unwritten, manuscripts unread, lots of this and that which an editor must do.

Nevertheless, as I work here in the Cabin, which is at the edge of the woods, I hear a new warbler song and out! pop like the little mechanical dog, Rex, that comes out of his kennel at the sound of your voice.

Magical Month

May! Warblers, wildflowers, new leaves, apple blossoms, green grass, frogs, snakes, woodchucks, birds' eggs, moths, butterflies: life at full tilt. May, the most fascinating month of the whole fascinating year!

Why don't we just take our vacations in May? Perhaps it's just as well we don't. Give the birds a chance to nest, the flowers a chance to bloom, the fish a chance to spawn, before the great industry of vacationing the public begins.

If we vacationed in May what would our wildlife look like in June?

I Help Build a Nest

A pair of robins have built their nest directly above the Cabin door. The nest is, in a sense, a cooperative affair. It is on a little shelf placed there by the Editor in the hope that something of the sort would happen. The shelf is only 3½ inches wide, while the nest protrudes outward by 5½ inches.

The first day's work by the birds was a total loss, because all of the coarse foundation material they laboriously carried up there fell off the shelf.

At nightfall I gathered it up and tried my hand at nest building. I found that what was needed was a cardboard strip thumbtacked to the front edge of the shelf to hold the material in place.

That worked fine, and next day the birds brought mud and, apparently approving my foundation weaving, began plastering. By the evening of the third day the home was completed. There followed a day and a half of rest before the first egg was laid.

Now that I have gained experience in nest building, I shall know better in the future how to put up a robin shelf. But I shall not extend my domestic help into such matters as incubation or nestling feeding. We must leave some responsibilities to the robins.

Betwixt Night and Day

It is 3:30. One can tell that a new day is near because there are gray streaks in the blue-black sky. A whip-poor-will has just begun his singsong calls. Tentatively a wood thrush rings his bell, then stops as though to adjust the pitch. A robin, several robins—the good old reliables—lean to the task of serenading the coming morn.

Now it is a gray dawn. Trees are visible. A wood peewee's voice comes from the eerie timberland. Young rabbits hop toward the marigold bed for a last snack before going home.

Morning dusk. There are clouds in the east, but none in the west. It's chilly now but the day will be warm, perhaps very warm, for the summer sun comes close to the earth.

A bluebird bubbles over with joy. His mate sits on their second nest in a bird-box in the orchard. Blue jays scream with maliciousness; a field sparrow runs the scale.

The clouds in the east are lined with gold. A bob-white whistles, a chickadee scolds, a crow calls. Titmice in the woods are suddenly full of business.

The wood thrush's bell is ringing now. The world of the night has gone to bed and the chorus of morning is in full swing.

"Life Would Be Joyful"

There was a time when I was writing copy for an advertising agency. Therefore, I have studied the gentle art of concocting persuasive advertisements. Every day I see ads that come from the brains of high-priced and high-powered copywriters.

But, I've thought and thought and for the life of me I can't think up a better advertisement than this. It came, the other day from a valued subscriber in Virginia:

Enclosed is my renewal. I've enjoyed NATURE NOTES immensely. If I could get as much satisfaction out of every dollar I spend, life would be joyful.

If you can think of a better one, let's have it.

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Robin Antics

Human children are not the only youngsters that like to get within range of a lawn sprinkler on hot days. During a recent hot and dry spell I noticed six gangling young robins standing in a circle about a sprinkler. I am sure they had expressions of delight on their faces.

As I watched, one of them became bold enough to approach the revolving arm of the sprinkler and stand with head raised and bill open, as though to let the spray go down its throat.

Other young robins appeared from time to time, until there were more than a dozen. A playful bird persisted in rushing at its fellows and was in turn chased by more than one.

Though fully grown, all had the distinctive plumage of the immature robin. No adults appeared. Plainly, such undignified doings were for children only.

Bathing Beauties

But the gangling young robins are not the only birds that enjoy the lawn sprinkler in question. Chipping sparrows, with their red-brown heads; field sparrows, with their pink beaks; and goldfinches are frequent visitors. Shallow pans were placed for their especial benefit, but these birds seem to prefer to bathe in the tiny pools that form in depressions of the ground.

A brilliant Baltimore oriole takes great delight in swooping down through the sparkling spray. He adds a decorative touch to the scene, to say the least. The cooling spray itself, however, is not the only magnet that draws birds to a sprinkler. As the ground becomes soaked, earthworms and insects come to the surface and are easily found.

The Danger in Ferns

Allow me to draw your attention to ferns. Growing this minute in cool glens, in the spray of waterfalls, and on moist rocky ledges are rarities that no one has ever found. To chance upon a colony of rare ferns, to photograph them, perhaps to sketch them, and to take one or two fronds for your collection is a zestful occupation for sultry summer days.

Nor does it take a lifetime to become familiar with all the ferns that are likely to be found in any one locality. Pursue the elusive hart's tongue and you will meet many other exquisite kinds before you find the object of your search.

Go into it earnestly, and before next summer you'll be looking for fruit dots, or squinting at the angle which the pinnae make with the rachis, or noting whether the inner basal pinnules are longer or shorter than their next-door neighbors. (Also, you'll be quietly cursing authors for not getting together on classification.)

Notice I said: "Before next summer." Fern fun does not end with the killing frosts of autumn. All winter you'll be taking out your mounted specimens, comparing them with illustrations, reading about them, and looking at them more closely.

Yes, there's danger of becoming fascinated with ferns. Why not get on the trail of a rare one, right now?

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Aggressor Grass

About the only thing that can be said for crab grass is that it's green in color. What an unmitigated pest of lawns and gardens it is! It is unlovely in form. It is coarse and uncultured. It spreads through aggression, by taking territory away from its neighbors.

Some people are highly allergic to the pollen of crab grass. With many others it causes an itching and a burning of the wrists and ankles through contact.

Scores of ideas have been advanced as to how to get rid of this alien. The trouble is that none of these schemes seems to work. Our expensive U.S. Department of Agriculture stands helpless before its advance.

When we get through putting aggressor nations in their places, how about getting to work on aggressor grasses? I don't know which will prove to be the bigger task.

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Giving Nature Half a Chance

Wildlife will come back, if given half a chance. This is shown by an example right under my nose. Next to the Cabin's woods is a large tract of woodland that was for many years a favorite hunting ground. In spite of No Hunting signs, people always contrived to shoot almost everything in fur or feathers that made a good target. In years gone by it was always "hunted out."

Prairie chicken, quail, squirrels, grouse were occasionally seen. But the bang, bang of the shotgun, in season and out, told why this tract of timber was so destitute of wild inhabitants.

A change has taken place. For about four years now these woods have been leased to the Illinois Department of Conservation as a game preserve. Signs conspicuously placed, state in no uncertain terms that hunting and trapping carry fines of \$50 to \$200. It is rare to hear a gunshot. As a result there has been a marked increase in the numbers of mammals of all kinds and birds of most of the larger species.

It is true that grouse have not come back, at least as far as I know, but given time I think this grand bird will return. Woodcocks are now occasionally seen and, in favorable habitats, quail are found. Hawks and owls, it may be noted, seem to be on the increase. Crows, however, are becoming scarce—perhaps because of a statewide campaign against them.

Among the mammals, foxes are now often seen, where before they were very rare. Fox squirrels are abundant, gray squirrels are appearing, and along the streams can be found many racoon tracks. Cotton-tail rabbits increased tremendously and reached a peak in the summer of 1939. Gardeners complained of the great rabbit nuisance. The following winter rabbit tracks were everywhere in the snows. But now this mammal seems to be on the decrease. No doubt nature is arriving at a balance through the increase of foxes and other natural enemies of the rabbit.

Of course those of us who try to raise a few chickens nearby don't love the foxes; but then, chickens have so many woodland enemies, including roving dogs, that they must be carefully guarded anyway.

Another result of posting this tract of woodland as a game preserve, has been the improved botanical situation. Plant diggers seem to have automatically ceased to come. Now woodlilies, wild clematis, orchids, ferns and other attractive plants may be found there. Wildflower pickers, too, have been absent. Trails that were constantly kept open have grown up in brambles. In short, this tract has been let more or less alone.

It is interesting to note how promptly nature goes to work to heal the scars of ravishments of the past. In fact, she is striving all of the time to heal up such scars. There is a constant building-up pressure in the woods, and when man's tearing down is reduced to a minimum, then this building-up process proceeds rapidly.

This is the heartening thing about conservation. All nature asks, in most cases, is to be let severely alone. She will come back, beginning now Why not, then, have more game preserves?

Make sure there will be game preserves—always. And they will be the centers about which our wildlife will revolve.

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Through the Cabin Window

Volume IX: January, 1942 — February, 1943

For the Duration [of World War II], NATURE NOTES will come to you stripped for action. All unnecessary pages will be thrown overboard. Any formality or show which we may have had will be forgotten. The cover illustration will be placed inside with the article it illustrates. There will be fewer new illustrations than heretofore. Perhaps at some future time we may find it advisable to use another grade of paper, or to make other changes. We believe you'll understand. Our motto is, "Business, but not as usual."

No doubt we could somehow manage to pay the increased costs of paper, photographs, cuts, and man-power which we are facing. But we feel that we ought to *use as little as possible of these things*.

A chemical used to make paper gleaming white is necessary in the manufacture of munitions. The same can be said of certain chemicals used in the making of halftone illustrations. Halftones are made of copper which, as everyone knows, is one of the metals for which our great war machine hungers.

Then there is man-power. The company which prints this magazine has already given many of its artisans to the armed forces. Some will be making planes and tanks. We wish all of them Godspeed.

It is helpful to the Nation, I think, for publishers to reduce their demands for work and materials. It is patriotic for subscribers to accept these changes.

I would like to know what you think about the matter. Will you write to me soon?

My reasons for continuing the publication of NATuRE NOTES are—

1) The magazine has found a niche among nature lovers and teachers of nature lore which no other publication will quite fit into.

2) I enjoy the contacts it affords with genuine lovers of nature throughout the Western Hemisphere.

3) It is good for the morale of all of us to read and write a few things not about war, especially things as fascinating as those found in NATURE NOTES.

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Thoughts

Like a breeze through a belfry thoughts drift through one's brain and are gone—where?

I ought to carry with me day in and day out a portable recording outfit or some other means of nailing down thoughts before they disappear. Some of my best editorials are never written. They appear when I am seining for minnows, or focusing my camera, or climbing trees, or doing any of the thousand and one odd things a nature-lover does. If I can't take time out from my task to jot them down in my notebook, they soon vanish into thin air. The same combination of circumstances that suggested these thoughts will probably never occur again in the whole universe. They are lost to posterity—much to posterity's profit.

Thoughts are the most volatile of volatile things. I would not call them "things" but for lack of a better word. They have no weight, no shape, no color, no substance. They are nothing. They are zero. They are not there at all!

Yet, thoughts are the world's great fiction, drama, music, pictures; they are electric refrigerators, automobiles, airplanes, statesmanship, happy living, hold-ups, editorials.

Won't someone kindly think hard and invent a pocket thought recorder?

Legs

Legs, you say, is a topic which the editor of NATURE NOTES had best let strictly alone! Is that so? I have for years concerned myself with the fact that many, many human legs are not used for what they were intended. In case no one has bothered to teach you what they were made for, I will reveal the secret—it's walking. My friends and relatives will sadly testify that have I harped on the subject. You can find things that I have sputtered about it in previous issues of this little publication.

In time of peace this presents a serious enough problem. In time of war its seriousness is greatly magnified.

Now, according to things I see in the papers, some Brig. Gens. are having the dickens of a time showing the doughboys how to walk. There's one encouraging thing about it, though. Hiking is easy to learn and, if persisted in, will soon put you in splendid condition. I think legs will come back.

Surprise..!

Last summer a woodchuck dug himself a den beneath a pile of old lumber near the Cabin. Late in the fall he began his long hibernation, and for all I know he's slumbering there below ground at the present moment.

But, during the winter the lumber has been removed. The entrance to his den is now fully exposed to the sky. How I wish I could be on hand to note the expression on his face when he wakes up, comes forth, and finds himself right out in the open!

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Afraid in the Woods

If there were beige dragons 90 ft. long with high-speed legs and insatiable appetites for human beings, then there might be some reason for being afraid in the woods. But to date, no such creature has been collected and nobody has come in with a convincing sight-record of one. Yet it's a fact that many city people are actually in terror when they enter the forest primeval.

Of what are they afraid? They do not know, and of that their fear is compounded. They have vague dreads—holdovers from warnings given them in childhood—of poison plants, of lethal snakes, of scorpions, of hornets, of bloodsucking bats, of undefined shapes like beige dragons. I have seen grown people go into spasms of terror at the sudden hoot of a barred owl. It is the dread of the unknown that seems to block the mind's ability to figure things out reasonably.

How can such people be shorn of their fears? Some cases are hard to cure, it is true. But get one young enough and wonders can be worked. The indicated treatment, of course, is to make the unknown known.

Take the patient to a museum and show him a stuffed owl. Acquaint him with the bird's home life, its nest, its eggs, its youngsters and how it feeds them. The human being may feel shame at having been afraid of such a timid creature, but don't rub that in. It's 10 to 1 he will be listening for owls next time he's out that way.

Or show him poison ivy flourishing in its native habitat, Tell him that it is sometimes like a shrub, but can change its ways and become a vine if it finds something upon which to climb. Make him familiar with its leaves. Pick a leaflet, holding it with the toughened ends of the fingers, just to prove it won't jump up and bite him in the face. Then scrub your hands with soap as soon as possible to illustrate that simple precautions should be taken. Explain that poison ivy never affects some people; those who are susceptible may find it very unpleasant for a while, but they soon recover.

Don't confine your teaching to dreaded things. Bring in a butterfly or a daisy now and then. Who knows? You may turn the patient into a famous naturalist!

Probably the hardest case with which to deal is the child whose mother takes him to a country place, adjusts herself at a bridge table, calls out sharply, "Junior, don't go near the woods! Snakes will bite you," then goes on with her bidding. You can't very well persuade the kid to disobey and go into the woods, or that it's not so—snakes won't bite him. Nor is it quite fair to Junior to infer that his immediate ancestor doesn't know a single thing about the snakes or the woods.

What then? Such cases will have to be dealt with by methods not too far outside the confines of your conscience.

I know of one such instance in which Junior, firmly grasping a live garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) which he had picked up outside the woods, came galloping to convince Mamma that it wouldn't kill her. Tables were upset, tallies were lost, and a whole afternoon of bridge went practically for naught.

How fared Junior? Was he punished? He couldn't well be spanked because that would have meant spanking the husband of the hostess—he had another one by the tail.

Let's Get This Straight

One good thing about these curtailed weather reports: I am less often irked by the looseness with which the terms zero and freezing are used in newspapers, on the radio, in magazines. A radio announcer was trying to tell an expectant public how cold it was. He said, with dramatic intonations, that it was twenty-two below freezing and hadn't been that since eighteen eighty something. About one tenth of one percentum of his listeners knew better.

On a terribly hot day in August a local paper came out with nice cool pictures of the inside of an ice house, showing calm cakes of ice sitting around. But the captions made us hotter by announcing that it was five degrees below zero in there.

And so it goes. Thirty-two degrees off! That's a high degree of inaccuracy. As a matter of fact, the commonly used temperature scale was, wisely or not, devised by a Mr. Fahrenheit. That's the scale that hangs out on the porch where father can look at it often. On this scale 212 degrees is the boiling point of water, 32 degrees is freezing and zero is—pretty cold!

Thirteen Bob-whites

A baker's dozen of Bob-whites have befriended me this winter. In return I have been throwing cracked corn on the ground just outside the Cabin Window.

Once a day they come, usually running, but sometimes sailing; always in a hurry, apparently fearful that a gun will bark nearby. How wild and beautiful they are! I could no more pull a trigger, on them than I could whirr my wings and fly away.

The males have clear white throats, more white above the eyes, set off by bands of black. The females and the immature have no such clear-cut head markings.

They see me through the Window, At first they were gone at the slightest movement of my hand. Now they merely look up, then go on eating. We're friends!

They eat like chickens, scratching in the snow, and giving their heads and necks little sideward jerks to cram the corn down in their crops and make room for a few more pieces. But the tempo of a bob-white's living is faster, far, than any domesticated fowl. "Quick, a hawk may swoop, a cat may spring—hurry, let's go."

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