

The Young Naturalist



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The Sparrows of Sable Island

Sable Island is the only place in the world that the Ipswich Sparrow is known to nest. Look on your map for a tiny crescent-shaped island one hundred miles off the coast of Nova Scotia, southeast of Halifax. The fogs and winds of the Atlantic blow continually across this tiny island of pure sand where only about eight people live. Why should any birds want to live there, nesting and raising their young? There are no trees and nothing grows higher than about two feet on the

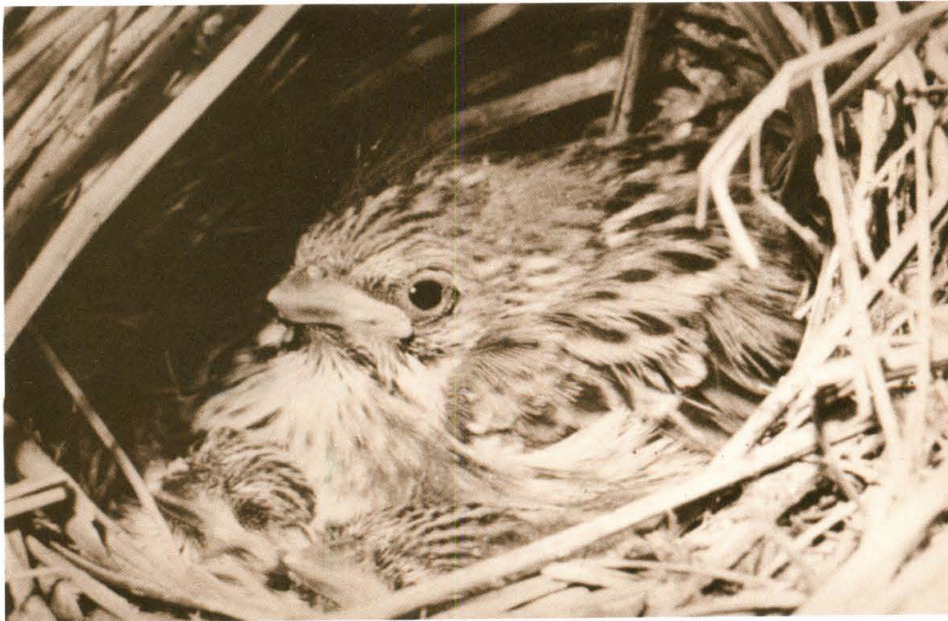
whole island. But in some places the ground is covered with a thick mat of grasses and weeds and it is deep in this grass that the pale gray sparrow, named "Ipswich" builds its nest and raises about four young each year.

On very low evergreen shrubs and willow, blueberry and cranberry bushes this little bird sits and sings in the summer. This is not the only bird that makes its home on this island of sand, "Isle aux Sable". One finds larger birds like gulls and terns nesting on the

sand as well as a few shore birds and ducks. House Sparrows have discovered this island too, as well as a few Starlings. The House Sparrows nest quite happily in the old barn that used to shelter some of the wild ponies that had been tamed for riding. All of the ponies are wild now, and live the year round on the open sand dunes, so the sparrows have the barn to themselves.

In summertime there is ample food for the birds in the way of insects, and weed seeds. Even though the Ipswich Sparrow is a seed-eating bird, he must have insects for his young. Before winter comes most of them fly 150 miles across open sea to the mainland and then south down the Atlantic coast where the weather is kinder than on Sable Island with its bitter winds.

How did this "little gray bird", as he is known on the island, find it in the first place? How long has he nested there and why does he prefer it to the mainland? Good photographs of the bird and its nest and young were taken this summer as well as tape recordings of its song by Doctor Donald Gunn of Ontario but there was nothing to give the answers to these questions. Very few people visit here because there is no harbour or landing place on the shallow sandy shores. Small planes can land on the sandy beach if the weather is fine and supply ships can anchor a few miles off shore and send in a barge



Photograph by D. R. Gunn

The Ipswich Sparrow is known as the "little gray bird" to the few inhabitants of Sable Island. The bird winters south down the Atlantic Coast.

How to Take Good Nature Photographs

PART 1 (first of a series)

This series of short articles will tell you how *you* can take good nature photographs with simple equipment. You may want to take pictures for various reasons: to keep a record for yourself or others of what you have seen, to help you to study some subject in detail, to let you show your own view of what is worth remembering, or perhaps just for the fun of taking pictures!

Basic Equipment

I am assuming that you have an inexpensive camera, like a Kodak Instamatic, and not a more expensive type. You may wish to take black and white pictures, or color slides or color prints. Color prints get to be pretty expensive, however, so I'll assume you are mainly interested in black and white prints or color slides. If you have a camera and film, that is all you really need!

Find out first how to use your camera. Find out how close you can be to a subject and still get a "sharp" picture. With an Instamatic you can take pictures as close as four feet away

from a subject. At that distance the smallest area you can photograph is about 3 feet by 3 feet.

With a Close-Up Attachment (an extra lens which can be bought to put on your camera over the regular lens) you can take clear pictures of subjects as close as 2½ feet. Then the smallest area you can photograph is about 20 inches by 20 inches. This kind of attachment is almost a necessity for some types of nature photographs in which details of small subjects must be shown clearly. Note: you cannot take extreme close-ups of really small subjects like insects or small flowers unless you have very special equipment. With a Close-Up Attachment on the camera, objects more than about 4 feet away from the camera will not look sharp in your pictures. So this item is to be used *only* for close-ups! If you do not have a Close-Up Attachment, you can still take a large number of very good nature photographs.

For many pictures sunlight will be all the light you need. Others may require the use of a flash. Most cameras have simple flash attachments with

flashbulbs to add light when and where you want it. Flash can add "snap" to many subjects, especially in color.

You should keep a small notebook with your camera to record where and when and how you take most pictures. Otherwise you might forget what it was you took a picture of!

Before you take each picture, look through the camera viewfinder and try to imagine what the "finished" picture will look like. This little step can help greatly to make you a good photographer. If the main thing in the picture isn't clear, or isn't in the best place, the picture may be a flop! Try to "compose" a simple pleasing arrangement and you will be rewarded by better pictures.

Often the most difficult thing in taking wildlife pictures is to get close enough to your subject. It is easy to photograph animals from far away but they will look like little dots in your finished picture. I'll tell you how to get close to animals in another article. Fortunately, there are lots of subjects for pictures which are easy to get close to. The next article will discuss some of these nature subjects and how to photograph them.

MARTIN H. EDWARDS

SPARROWS — from Page 1

with passengers, food and building supplies. These are the only contacts with the outside world that the lighthouse keeper and the weather man and their families have except, of course, radio. We know a little more about how the wild ponies came to be on this remote island. Their story goes back to the days of pirates on the high seas and we will tell about them in another article.

JOAN L. GUNN

Bats have been found as far south as 55 degrees south latitude, and as far north as 70 degrees north latitude.



Sketch by Don Foxall

A Close-up Lens on your camera will enable you to take interesting pictures of subjects as close as 2½ feet. A lens of this type is not expensive.

Club News



The Toronto Junior Field Naturalists' Club held its annual Christmas Bird Census on December 30th, when twenty-five members of the Bird Group turned out to cover two long-established routes. Those in north Toronto had a particularly successful day. In the course of five and a half hours spent in Wilket Park, Sunnybrook, Glendon Hall and Edwards Gardens they found twenty-six species of birds, including a cooperative Great-horned Owl which was viewed in detail by many of the group. They also saw several Robins, two Flickers, a Northern Shrike and a Field Sparrow, as well as a Red Fox, numerous field mice and Red and Gray Squirrels.

During the autumn, indoor meetings of the T.J.F.N.C. were held each month. In November the Bird Group heard Dr. Murray Speirs discuss popu-

lation studies, and in December Toronto bird artist Barry Kent McKay demonstrated his techniques. The Botany Group visited the Botany Building and greenhouse of the University of Toronto, and planned a tour and discussion of the tropical plants in the Allan Gardens.

From Ottawa, Kathy Fairbarns reports that the Macoun Field Club held no bird census of its own, but that a number of members joined in the census sponsored by the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club. The Macoun Field Club holds weekly meetings, and during December their speakers included Mr. A. Dyhrberg, who showed slides and described the animals of Sumatra and Java, and Mr. Fred Rootes, who talked about his experiences in the Antarctic.

BARBARA WILKINS

Comet Named for its Discoverer

PART I — of a two-part article on comets

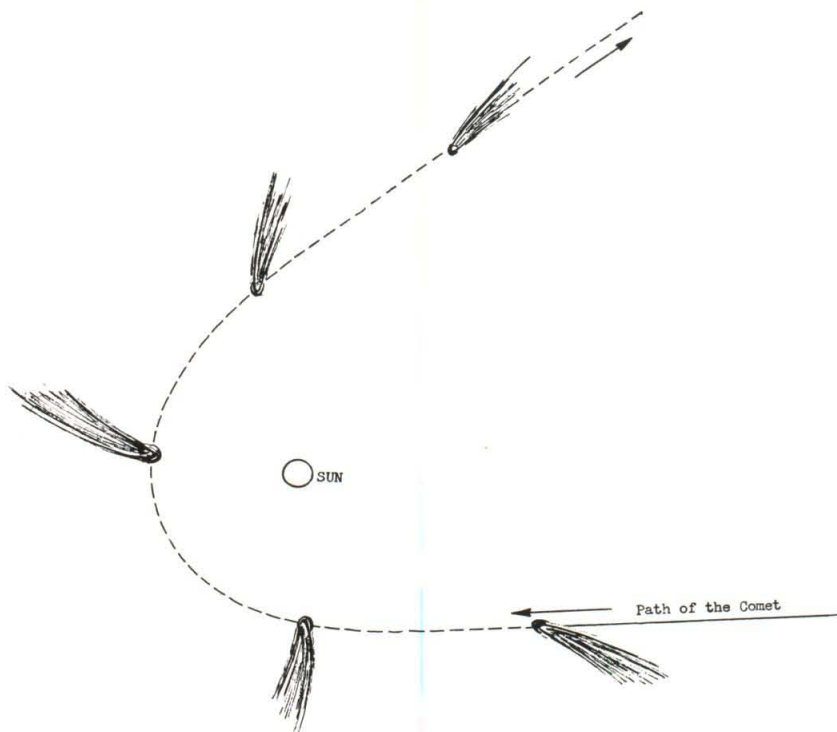
On average about eight times each year, astronomers are able to photograph one of those strange, fuzzy apparitions called a comet. On rare occasions a comet will come close enough to Earth or be bright enough to be seen with the unaided eye. Until a few hundred years ago the appearance of a comet in the sky was enough to cause ignorant people to predict the end of the world. We no longer fear comets or treat them as bad omens but look forward to seeing one to marvel at its eerie beauty.

Comets are now believed to be composed of frozen gases (water, ammonia, methane, etc.) in which are trapped solid stone-like particles and dust. They move in large orbits around the Sun much as planets do but require, generally, hundreds or thousands of years to complete one trip around the Sun. The solid part of a comet is called the nucleus. As the nucleus approaches the Sun some of the gases evaporate to form a large "coma" or head. Radiation from the Sun "blows" material away from

the coma to form the comet's tail. Because of the way in which the tail is formed, it always points away from the Sun. Hence, when a comet is moving away from the Sun its tail precedes its head! The head of a comet may have a diameter of several hundred thousand miles. It is thus much larger than Earth and may become as large as the Sun. The tail may attain enormous lengths. A comet that appeared in the year 1843 had the longest tail ever recorded — nearly 190,000,000 miles or twice the distance between the Sun and Earth.

Most comets are discovered on photographs taken at large observatories. Many are discovered by amateur astronomers who spend long hours sweeping the sky in search of these strange visitors from space. Every astronomer would like to discover a comet because comets are named after their discoverer. Thus we have Comet Ikeya-Seki discovered in 1965 by the two Japanese astronomers Ikeya and Seki. Mr. Ikeya actually has two comets named after himself! Next month we shall discuss comets further.

DOUGLAS P. HUBE



Sketch by D. P. Hube

The tail of a comet always points away from the Sun. Find out why.

WOODLORE FOR THE NATURALIST

John Macfie

Wolves, Deer, and People

A hunting companion of mine once wounded a large buck deer. The severely-injured animal managed to elude us as we tracked it for nearly two miles, at which point approaching darkness forced us to turn for home. I remember hoping then that wolves would quickly find the crippled animal, to save it from lingering death. And that is exactly what happened. The trail, taken up again next morning, led to the partly-eaten carcass of the deer surrounded by the tracks of a family group of Timber Wolves that had zeroed in on the scent

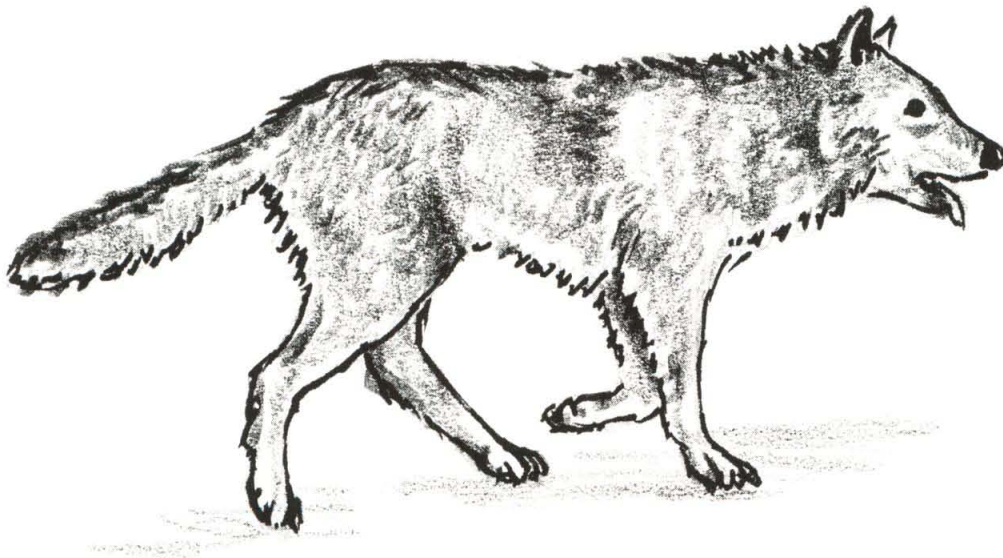
of the wounded animal during the night.

Many mortally-wounded deer escape from hunters each fall. Nature's way of taking care of sick or injured wild things is through predators. In a balanced wildlife situation, none need suffer for long.

We tend, consciously or not, to group wild animals in two classes, "good" and "bad". "Good" creatures are those we have found to be edible or, like the song birds, aesthetically pleasing. "Bad" species are largely those that seem to

compete with us in our enjoyment of the "good" ones. The Ontario Timber Wolf ranks high on many people's "bad" list because, like them, it likes to kill and eat deer.

It is reasonable to assume that other animals classify the species sharing their environment, just as we do. I wonder how many place the human animal in their "good" group. Cats and dogs, perhaps. Hardly deer. And I wonder if, in the deer's "bad" list, we humans rate above or below the Timber Wolf.



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