

THE WEASELS OF SOUTHERN MANITOBA

By NORMAN AND STUART CRIDDLE

IN BOYHOOD days we shared with others the popular belief that all weasels were harmful. Our father originally believed it and he had been so taught through contact with game-keepers of estates in England where all predatory creatures were looked upon as vermin. Weasels were, therefore, hunted on sight and killed with a persistency only exceeded in the equally unreasonable destruction of snakes.

Once, on a date unrecorded, several of us saw a large weasel in a wood-pile and, being possessed with the prevailing belief, we at once gave chase. The hunt was long, but eventually the weasel disappeared beneath some log buildings. We had hardly gathered around the hole, sticks in hand, before the weasel emerged with a mouse which it placed at the entrance and then disappeared down the hole, quickly returning again with another rodent, repeating this manoeuvre until eventually six were exhibited before us.

The train of thoughts to which this incident gave rise was a new one, and we paused in our hunt, but the courage of the animal, combined with the unmistakable evidence of its usefulness, soon created so profound an impression that we ultimately left the weasel in possession of the field and thereafter confined our efforts to observing rather than to killing, the present article being the result of our observations.

Our old associates, Messrs. E. H. and C. Vane, though now occupying their own homes, have continued to observe the habits of weasels and, from them we are indebted for many notes. E. Criddle has remained to work with us and much that we record below is his. A younger brother, Talbot, has also supplied us with reports of his experiences and finally, we are indebted to several neighbors who, imbibed with some of our desire for knowledge, have freely contributed observations.

The object in writing this paper at the present time, is to counteract several very biased accounts of the economic standing of the weasel which have recently appeared in print. We also hope to induce the same desire for observation and knowledge which the incident mentioned above created in us; feeling sure that observation will develop a very different idea of the habits of weasels from that which is at present held by the majority of people.

Southern Manitoba is inhabited by three species of weasel which may be recognized in life by their various sizes, and from specimen in hand by the following characters:

LONG-TAILED WEASEL, *Mustela longicauda* Bonaparte.—Tail long, about six inches, black tip extending well back. Total length of male seventeen inches, female thirteen inches.

BONAPARTE'S WEASEL, *Mustela cicognanii* Bonaparte.—Length of tail three and one-half inches, black tip short. Total measurement, male twelve inches, female nine inches.

LEAST WEASEL, *Mustela rixosa* (Bangs).—Much smaller than the other two, not greatly exceeding a large mouse in size. Tail without a black tip.

All our weasels are brown above in summer time and they turn white in winter so that the weasel of the warmer months later become the ermine of commerce. The black tip, however, is always retained.

There is still much to be learned about the breeding habits of weasels due to the skill with which they conceal their dens. It is known that they make their homes in holes; a hollow log, an old gopher burrow or a mouse residence may supply the necessary accommodation and the fur or feathers of their victims are often used to line the nests. There is, seemingly, but a single litter during the year, which is probably cared for only by the mother. A family of young consists of from four to eight members. The hunting is done mostly at night and on this account the animals are seldom seen but the presence of a female frequenting a certain locality is a good indication that there is a family in residence somewhere near. The mother is, indeed, ever watchful in the interests of her offspring and she had been known to show great courage in attempting to defend them.

Young weasels, like most juvenile creatures, have a superabundance of energy which they exhaust by innumerable gambols together. In these antics they climb trees and run along fence rails almost as actively as a squirrel, and when fighting they eject a strong musky odour which is very noticeable when a family of youngsters is at play and still more so when two males meet in battle. Whether this scent is of any marked value under such circumstances is uncertain but there is little doubt that it provides some protection against other enemies.

As winter approaches, the weasel families separate, and each individual establishes its own headquarters, which is generally the former residence of some rodent. The nest of the former occupant being renovated and used as a sleeping place. There is a store chamber, perhaps some distance

away, in which surplus food is hidden for future use. Stores of mice, etc., are added to whenever opportunity offers, but they are seldom used when fresh victims can be obtained.

During the winter of 1921-22 a female long-tailed weasel made her home in the basement of the junior writer's house and her bed consisted of a bag of feathers, where she evidently slept in comfort, despite the people overhead. This animal had free access to the summer kitchen, where she made herself very much at home and helped herself to meat, milk and such other objects as were to her fancy. She eventually became quite tame and would readily climb up the observer's leg to take meat from his hand. Her store was never located, but her tracks showed that she often wandered more than half a mile away in search of food. About twenty Ruffed Grouse were frequenting the nearby woods at the time and most of them made regular evening visits to the house for food. The weasel, however, appeared to ignore them entirely.

Another Long-tailed Weasel took up its residence near the farmyard during the winter of 1922-23 and made its headquarters in a threshing machine. The nest was somewhat roughly constructed and consisted of a convenient bunch of straw and chaff under the cylinder. Well to the back was a pile of approximately three pounds of droppings which were found to contain a considerable amount of the hair of mice and rabbits, but no bird remains were present. This weasel had selected a store chamber some one hundred and forty yards away from the nest. Two bush rabbits had been dragged to the entrance and numerous smaller rodents were taken below ground. The rabbits were buried beneath the snow and eaten as necessity arose. This weasel had ready access to all the farm buildings but, in spite of the presence of poultry, confined its hunting to mice and rats.

The weasel is a born hunter and among all the carnivorous animals of North America we doubt whether any excel it in boldness and activity. So quick indeed are the animal's movements that it comes and goes, vanishes and reappears in a manner quite bewildering to the observer. Before the days of enlightenment, we cornered the animals more than once, at least we thought we had, but when the critical moment arrived for moving the last log or digging away the last sod, behold, the weasel was no longer there, having vanished as mysteriously as ghosts are supposed to do.

The weasel's animated nature induces it to wander far afield in search of prey. In summer its actions almost escape notice, but in winter the freshly fallen snow tells a tale that is unmistakable. There one may see the tracks leading in every direction, indeed there might have been a dozen

weasels present instead of one, judging by those innumerable footsteps. Very little escapes the attention of this animal; at one time following along a bush rabbit's runway, at another entering the burrow of a pocket gopher or darting at a mouse as the disturbed rodent attempts to escape. It may well be that while we are trying to trace the weasel it is more successfully observing us, because inquisitiveness is one of its characteristics. It is doubtless its fearless curiosity that makes the animal seem tame and there is no doubt that it would be much less frequently seen but for these traits. Its inquisitiveness, indeed, often leads it to destruction not only by dogs and cats but, alas, also by man.

The summer activities of weasels are much more difficult to follow than are those of winter and we can only guess at the extent of their rambles by the fact that it is almost impossible to set a trap in the vicinity of a weasel's abode without catching it within a few days, showing that it enters practically every hole in search of its legitimate prey.

Weasels like water both for drinking and washing themselves. A bird trough placed conveniently for observation purposes was frequently visited by these animals. In drinking they held their mouths very close to the water and as far as we could see, lapped the liquid up with rapid movements of the tongue. As a rule, after drinking, they would merely spring to the ground and vanish amid a bunch of scolding birds, but occasionally we have seen an animal slowly drag itself through the water and follow this performance by some rapid gambols, or a quick run, a method of drying which most of us have practiced in our youth.

Weasels have doubtless numerous natural enemies and it is possible that the smaller species are attacked by the larger. Among their more notable foes may be reckoned coyotes, foxes, badgers, hawks and owls. It hardly seems possible, however, that carnivorous creatures alone are capable of reducing weasels to a normal balance and we suspect that they suffer from diseases similar to those known to attack badgers and skunks. The smaller weasels are also affected by the food supply and there is a marked fluctuation in their numbers, dependent upon the prevalence of mice.

Man, as we point out elsewhere, is a very important factor in the survival of the weasel and it is largely in his hands whether these animals are perpetuated. His companions, the dog and cat, also play a leading part as weasel destroyers and each has a marked influence in keeping these animals from the barnyard.

The fact that weasels frequently kill many more animals than they require for immediate use has

been universally interpreted as a lust for killing—a supposition which we believe to be quite erroneous. It is true that weasels often kill more than they need, but the surplus is not necessarily wasted because the animals always store it for future use, in much the same way as do badgers, minks or skunks, and with the same object in view as squirrels have in gathering nuts. We have observed many such stores, but as far as our observations go, the habit of killing in excess occurs much more prominently in the late summer and autumn months than in the spring. Indeed, we have no records of excessive spring slaughter and this indicates that the supposedly blood-thirsty habit of weasels is no more a lust for killing than is the woodsman's foresight in providing his larder with meat for the winter months. It should be noted in this connection that members of the weasel family, when undisturbed, do not leave their victims scattered about, but carefully store them away, and in many instances the bodies are buried with earth or taken under ground in order to preserve them. We suspect that this instinct for preserving food for future use accounts for most of the excessive killing by carnivorous animals instead of this latter indicating an aimless desire for slaughter which would unnecessarily deplete the food supply of the future. This instinct, however, does not seem to be as definite as that of some rodents, and there is no doubt that much of the stored meat decays before it can be utilized.

The prevailing idea that weasels are alike in their food habits is no more true than is the claim that hawks and owls have identical habits. Indeed, a knowledge of nature will show that similarity in habits is not a common feature in allied species inhabiting identical territory. In the case of weasels, size alone should suggest variations in food possibilities and this is fully verified by a study of the animals.

The adverse criticism against weasels is based on the same form of evidence as is so constantly employed to condemn predatory birds, namely the occasional killing of poultry or the prominently displayed attack upon some game or song bird. In other words, the every day habits of the animals are overlooked while the casual ones, being more spectacular, are used as a basis for general condemnation.

Before we can arrive at the facts it is necessary to remember that there are three species of weasels involved which not only differ from one another in size, and therefore in capabilities of doing harm, but also in habits to at least as great an extent as our birds of prey. Each kind should thus be judged on its merits rather than collectively on conclusions drawn from observations on different species.

The species that lends itself most readily to popular observation is the Long-tailed Weasel, *Mustela longicauda*, an animal of great boldness and remarkable agility. Its food habits are much more varied than are those of other species and in killing its prey it is only limited by its power to overcome the animals attacked. Bush rabbits, *Lepus americanus*, are among the largest of its victims and even with these more young than adults are captured. Nevertheless, mature specimens are often overcome and on one occasion the junior writer saw a location where a weasel and a rabbit had rolled down a bank fully seventy feet high, the former retaining its hold on the latter with the pertinacity of a bulldog.

On another occasion, Mr. T. Criddle observed one of these weasels attacking a scrub gopher *Citellus franklinii*, which it had almost overcome when interrupted. The destructive pocket gopher, *Thomomys* sp., is another animal that suffers severely from the weasel; this appears to be especially true in winter, when the hunter boldly enters the rodent's burrow in search of it, and, after killing it, frequently makes the gopher's residence a temporary headquarters from which to make numerous raids upon other rodents in the vicinity. Innumerable instances could be quoted in which the victims of weasels were rabbits, gophers or mice. The shrill cry of a rabbit in the dark is nearly always due to a weasel's attack. Indeed, we have often watched the latter at work during the twilight hours. First would come the almost noiseless run of the small rabbit with its characteristic dodging and this would be followed by the appearance of the agile foe which, at times, would leap high over obstacles and at others move swiftly beneath them. Then there would follow intermittent cries of the rabbit as the weasel secured a temporary hold of its quarry, for be it noted that this hunter apparently bites anywhere to begin with and it is probable that the blood made to flow acts as an aid to tracking as well as weakening the prey. Several similar close encounters might occur before the rabbit would be finally overcome, but weasels are very persistent when they once get into contact with their victims and it is therefore very seldom that the latter escape. In killing, they either penetrate the brain with their teeth, or dislodge the vertebrae behind the head.

It is highly probable that some of these prolonged hunts are due to a playfulness on the part of the weasel, a phenomenon which is paralleled by the well-known cat and mouse performances. Indeed, Mr. Ronald Buckell assures the senior writer that he has witnessed encounters of this sort in England, the hunter being a stoat and the victim a rabbit. The stealthiness with which this

member of the weasel family would creep up to the rabbit and nip it and then stand high on its hind legs to watch where it went, was so obviously a matter of fiendish sport as to be unmistakable. Moreover, this playfulness was speedily terminated by a vital bite when the stoat tired of its sport.

Bonaparte's weasel is more secretive and less bold than its larger relative, and it is less often found in the haunts of man. We have discovered its home in winter time beneath old straw piles where it doubtless obtained abundant food by devouring the mice that congregate in such places. On one occasion, indeed, on moving some straw, we came upon eleven of these rodents, all neatly placed in a heap.

We have no record of Bonaparte's weasel killing poultry, and we doubt whether it ever does so. Doubtless the young of some wild birds are captured, but we must recall the fact that this can only happen during a limited period of the year. At other times, the destruction of birds is seldom possible and the weasel is consequently obliged to turn to mice for food.

The Least weasel, or as it might well be termed, the mouse weasel, is such a midget in comparison with the other species that it usually passes unnoticed unless caught in a trap. It is quite incapable of killing poultry, but, being small, it can readily follow mice down their holes or along their runways. It probably kills some nestling birds, and perhaps extends its bill of fare to insects. The following is taken from the manuscript of an article by the junior writer on *Microtus minor*.

"In 1922, these mice went into winter quarters in great numbers and their homes were well stocked with food. Three homes were under observation in which all went well until the middle of February, 1923. Then, within a few days, each was taken possession of by a Least weasel and the inhabitants quickly destroyed. One mouse residence near my house was occupied by a weasel for about two weeks, during which time I observed where several mice had been carried over the snow to the home. This mouse residence was examined in April and in it were discovered six dead *Microtus minor*, one *Evotomys*, the head of another and at least six or eight other remnants including *Microtus drummondii*, these last remains being chiefly indicated by the hair-lined nest of the weasel.

"The homes of twenty-seven other mouse communities were examined at this time and all were found to have been entered by weasels, the mice having been killed and partly eaten in each instance. Thus from being an abundant animal this species was reduced to insignificance in the course of a few weeks while all other kinds of mice had suffered severely from the same enemy."

Supply and demand are prominent factors in governing our weasels' food habits. The two smaller species, as we have already pointed out are so dependent upon mice for a living that they

increase or diminish with the fluctuation of these creatures. The Long-tailed Weasel, however, is not so easily checked by the temporary disappearance of any particular kind of game. If mice are scarce it devotes greater attention to gophers or bush rabbits and if these are not in sufficient numbers to satisfy its appetite, the animal raids a poultry house as a last resource. In nine years out of ten, this weasel will find sufficient food about the fields and woods, but on the tenth it may be obliged to temporarily turn to domestic animals. It is at such times that the weasel is seen and its deeds recorded. A thousand mice may have been killed in the meantime, but the destruction of half a dozen hens is alone used as evidence of the weasel's economic standing.

In the last twenty years we have permitted weasels to frequent the farm buildings at will and the poultry house has been no exception. In that time rats and mice suffered severely from the weasels, while the total number of poultry taken were six. Many times that number, however, have been killed by rats.

When we review our experiences of the past, we are astonished to find what few poultry have been killed by weasels. Our own losses in forty-two years have not exceeded fifteen birds and even these were usually eatable. There have been reports of losses from time to time from neighbors, but on looking into details we find that there are very few farmers who have experienced more than three separate occasions of weasel depredation and the total loss per farmer in the last thirty years does not, we are sure, exceed ten birds. This is surely a remarkably small payment to weasels in general for the great good done by them in killing rodents.

We wish to point out, too, that only the exceptional weasel becomes a poultry killer. In most cases apparently it is a fully-grown male that does the killing. There are exceptions, of course, but when we see a large weasel actively engaged in rodent hunting within a few feet of a brood of newly hatched chickens and not even looking at them, we must at least pause to ask if this animal is the enemy that we were taught to believe it to be.

Numerous wild birds necessarily fall victims to weasels, particularly in the breeding season when the young are helpless in their nests. It also occasionally happens that a mature grouse or duck is surprised and overcome, but we have not secured much evidence to indicate that adult birds suffer very greatly in this way. Indeed, the only occasion we can recall was when a weasel had dragged a Sharp-tailed Grouse over the snow and even in this instance there was no direct evidence to prove that the bird had been killed by the weasel.

FIELD NOTES

The notes presented below have been furnished from field observations made in the vicinity of the writers' home at Treesbank, Manitoba, and jotted down as the incident occurred. They are abbreviated in order to save space.

November 2, 1908.—A Long-tailed Weasel quite white, though bush rabbits are still brown.

November 21, 1910.—There is a Bonaparte Weasel about the farm buildings which has free access to the fowl-house. It is rapidly exterminating the mice.

October 3, 1913.—Observed a Long-tailed Weasel with a field mouse which it took down a hole. The former was white.

March 27, 1916.—A Long-tailed Weasel still white.

July 19, 1917.—T. Criddle saw a Long-tailed Weasel attacking a scrub gopher, *C. franklinii*. The rodent was in mortal terror and squeaked continuously. Eventually the gopher was thrown on its back and would have been speedily killed but for an interruption.

October 29, 1917.—C. Vane writes:

"A weasel last night made its way into our fowl-house, the door being inadvertently left open. The weasel killed eleven fowl, some of which were dragged into the yard. All the largest fowls were selected, the pullets remaining untouched though they were in the majority. Next night the weasel dug a hole beneath the building and killed a hen and two cocks, returning for another during the day, making a total of fourteen in all."

This weasel proved to be a large one, probably an old male.

October 31, 1917.—A *rixosa* almost white. It was evidently hunting for mice.

July 2, 1918.—Noted a Long-tailed Weasel with a freshly killed mouse near the farm buildings. This weasel was seen in the afternoon running off with a rat. Two small punctures in the throat were the only evidence of the manner in which its death had been brought about.

September 11, 1918.—A *longicauda* took seven pocket gophers placed near the Entomological Laboratory. It seized the rodents by the middle of their back and held them high while carrying them away. They were stored in an old gopher burrow some two hundred yards distant. One of these animals was tied to supports by both hind legs, which caused the weasel considerable trouble to free, but this was ultimately accomplished by biting the legs through above the string.

October, 1918.—Following a severe outbreak of mice in 1916-17, Bonaparte's weasel increased enormously and very soon reduced the rodents to comparative rarity. This resulted in a scarcity of food for the weasels, which in their turn became greatly reduced in numbers. It is interesting to

note that no poultry losses were reported during the period of mouse scarcity.

November 9, 1918.—Another Long-tailed Weasel about the farm buildings. Mice around the laboratory have vanished.

July 11, 1919.—Two *longicaudas* present. The poultry stretch out their necks and cackle when the weasels draw near, but the latter pay little attention and continue with their mouse hunting. They have been seen running off with rats on several occasions.

July 12, 1919.—The two weasels mentioned above have been joined by three more, the whole probably constituting a family. They have proved quite entertaining with their various antics but they show no inclination to attack our poultry despite the presence of numerous small chicks.

August 6, 1919.—A Long-tailed Weasel had a drink at the bird trough this morning and then slowly crawled through the water. It later frisked about as if to dry itself.

August 20, 1919.—A *longicauda* in the Insectary ran at me this morning apparently with a view to intimidating. It uttered a shrill cry while making the attack, but retreated after advancing within two feet. (This weasel remained around the farm buildings well into the winter.)

July 11, 1920.—There are two large weasels about the buildings which have the usual free access to the poultry-house. Each has been noted with rats and this afternoon one of them was seen running into the woods carrying a rat, followed by two excited swallows.

April 2, 1921.—A *longicauda* seen near Laboratory. It is still white.

April 18, 1921.—The above-mentioned weasel is now brown.

May 31, 1921.—Saw a Bonaparte's weasel capture a Red-backed Vole after a long hunt during which the pursuer never once lost track of its victim.

July 31, 1921.—A Long-tail drinking. The squeaking of a rat a few days previously had indicated the presence of a weasel.

August 21, 1921.—Heard cries of a small rabbit at dusk to-night, which investigation showed was being attacked by a large weasel. The rabbit was later carried to the weasel's store chamber below ground.

October 31, 1921.—A Long-tail almost white. It has been about the farm buildings for more than a month.

February 17, 1921.—Came across the marks of a weasel carting some object over the snow. An investigation revealed a recently-killed pocket gopher with its captor still in possession.

November 8, 1924.—Shot a bush rabbit and left it lying. Two hours later the rodent was

found to have been dragged beneath a brush pile and partly eaten. Innumerable weasel tracks left no doubt as to the identity of the thief.

January 31, 1925.—A Long-tailed Weasel killed three hens last night, and rather severely bit a cock about the neck. This, or another weasel, had been around the farm-yard for some time. (The specimen was a large male.)

At least twice within our memory, weasels have made their way into a temporary meat-house where, not satisfied with the ample supply of food available, they have proceeded to hide everything capable of being moved. In this way ox-hearts, suet and other delicacies have vanished down holes or behind boards and logs.

In the fall of 1924, Mr. A. Cooper, a prominent poultryman of Treesbank, observed a large weasel carrying a freshly killed rat which it stored below ground and then returned towards the poultry-house, causing no little apprehension to the owner. Within a short time, however, the weasel reappeared with another rat which it hid as before. In this way several rodents were accounted for during the afternoon, and Mr. Cooper assures us that the weasel "kept up the good work for some days".

Being a farmer of many years' standing, Mr. Cooper has naturally lost some poultry through the agency of weasels, but while he remarks that "there are good as well as bad actors among weasels", he has the practical good sense to recognize the value of an efficient ratter even though it be a weasel.

Our sister, Maida Criddle, writes under date of March 4, 1925:

"There is another weasel (*longicauda*) in the fowl-house, a well-behaved one this time. It came and took a piece of meat out of my hand quite nicely, which it carried down a hole and then came and sniffed all over my mitt to see if there was any more. I thought it had been killed when I visited the farm buildings next day as there was a strong smell of musk on the cat and in the fowl-house, but the weasel was there as cheeky as ever. It got hold of my skirt twice and tried to pull me down its hole. I think it wanted the cloth for a bed, as it was taking straw and other material down the burrow. The poultry were very frightened at first, but they are getting used to the weasel's presence now."

Once while ploughing, we observed a Long-tailed Weasel carrying a field mouse which it dropped, and ran down a hole. The junior writer then picked up the rodent and held it near the burrow, upon which the weasel came out and grabbed the mouse at its opposite end, pulling lustily, actually permitting itself to be dragged from the hole while thus occupied. Ultimately the weasel was permitted to retain possession of its prey.

On one occasion the senior writer saw a Long-tailed Weasel resting on a tree. It had squeezed its abdomen between a forked limb and was

hanging thus in evident pain. On being approached very closely it showed some inclination to fight, but changed its mind and moved instead to another limb, where it again squeezed its body between two branches. There was a most pathetic look upon the animal's face, almost as if it were requesting assistance. We have no doubt that it had eaten part of a poisoned mouse or gopher.

On another occasion a Long-tailed Weasel was caught in a trap set for gophers, and, on being released by Miss M. Criddle, at once turned upon its liberator and bit savagely at her boot. It then moved a short distance away to a tub of water, where it drank thirstily, merely glancing at the observer from time to time while doing so, and then ran off out of sight.

Mr. T. Criddle records a similar experience. After liberating a large weasel from a trap, it immediately rushed at him and persisted in its attack with such ferocity that it was three times picked up and thrown, on each occasion to a greater distance, before it finally abandoned its offensive.

We have no record of a weasel making an unprovoked attack upon anyone.

Hawks are not always the aggressors, as is shown by an incident reported by Mr. H. L. Seamans, of Lethbridge, Alberta. Mr. Seamans noted a large buzzard suddenly fly straight upwards from a fence post, and then alight upon another one some distance away. A little while afterward this bird once more arose in the same manner as before, and presently repeated the performance again. An investigation then followed and revealed that a Long-tailed Weasel was following the hawk from post to post.

We should hardly expect a weasel to attempt to capture a bird of the above type. On the other hand, it is possible that these animals might be able to startle a hawk sufficiently to cause it to drop its prey, which would thus provide food for the weasel.

CONCLUSION

In summing up the evidence for and against weasels, there are three important points to be considered. Firstly, the food habits are divisible into useful and harmful ones, depending upon whether the animal takes rodents or poultry and other useful birds; and secondly, there is the value of the weasel's fur, which represents an important asset. We have tried to show in the previous pages what the food habits are and we think that even the most prejudiced person must pause on beholding the evidence.

One at least of our weasels is almost wholly beneficial, and we have no hesitation in proclaiming this species, *rixosa*, the most useful of all

Canadian predators. Of *cicognantii*, the evidence in its favor seems overwhelming and we are, therefore, confronted with *longicauda* alone. What is the evidence? This weasel is a perpetual mouser, a hunter of pocket gophers, ground squirrels and rats, an enemy of bush rabbits, a stealer of young birds and a casual raider of poultry-houses. It is a destroyer of fully two thousand rodents for every fowl taken and the possessor of a pelt that surpasses any other weasel's in value.

As an illustration of the value of weasels' pelts, we would point out that more than fifty-four thousand were secured and sold in Manitoba during the year ending September 30, 1924, representing a value of approximately \$40,000.

It is evident that early training has had much to do with the prejudice against weasels and that the folk lore of other lands has influenced others as it influenced us in boyhood days.

In the past, the trapper has had the lives of these animals much in his own hands, and he has not, we regret to say, always used his privileges in the best interests of posterity. His object has usually been to kill as many as possible, and in this he has been ably seconded by the fur trade which, by advertising and circularizing, have done everything possible to increase the output of furs. No wonder, therefore, that fur-bearing animals are

becoming scarce or that noxious ones are over-running the country.

It is surely time to call a halt to these proceedings. Trapping is a legitimate trade with which we have no quarrel, but there are other interests to be taken into consideration, among which are those of agriculture. It seems to us that the farmer should be considered first in this matter. We all know of the enormous losses that are caused by gophers, mice and allied rodents. Grain crops, fruit trees and forests are all affected by these creatures. As the carnivorous animals have diminished in numbers, the rodent tribe have increased by leaps and bounds, causing untold mischief in so doing.

The remedy is largely in our own hands. Two important considerations are involved in this question, namely, the conservation of useful animals, and the preservation of our crops. These aims can only be accomplished by restoring the balance which Nature originally maintained, but which has been upset by man. Much has already been done with this end in view, but for reasons which we have already indicated, weasels which constitute one of the most important factors have been left out. There are no valid reasons for such a course, but, on the contrary, there is ample evidence to prove that these animals should be protected.

IN MEMORIAM

JAMES BALLANTYNE

Born March, 1835

Died April 6, 1925

An esteemed citizen, and a long-standing and deeply interested member of the OTTAWA FIELD-NATURALISTS' CLUB, passed from our midst into the great unseen on April 6th of the present year, in the person of Mr. James Ballantyne.

Mr. Ballantyne was born in March, 1835, at Newcastleton, in Scotland, and had therefore at the time of his decease entered upon his ninety-first year.

His parents came to Canada in 1840, when he was about five years old, and settled on a farm near Smith's Falls, Ont., and in the course of Mr. Ballantyne's career, he developed into a man of versatility and great usefulness, and over sixty years ago became a permanent citizen of Ottawa.

As a business man, he engaged successfully in many enterprises; as a public man, he took a deep interest in educational matters, and was intrusted with many municipal and county responsibilities, often consecutive for years; and

in the things of the mind, he associated himself as a member of numerous scientific and literary institutions.

He was a long-standing member of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club, a regular attendant of its excursions and lectures, and contributed an article on "Our Squirrels", which was published in the June, 1888, number of the official organ of the club which, at that time, bore the title of the *Ottawa Naturalist*. And for long he was an auditor of the Club.

He was also, for upwards of forty years, a member of the former Ottawa Literary and Scientific Society, a member for many years of the Horticultural Society, and for some years a member of the Camera Club; and with great liberality of thought, Mr. Ballantyne was a man broadly tolerant of all who aimed for the betterment of the world; and all who knew him best will ever remember the efficacious and exemplary life which he led.—A. H.



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