



A cottontail scurried from a bush in bounding flight, the story of its frightened hurry written in the snow. The sound of heavy tapping spurred us to an eager hunt, for these woods are filled with the fresh work of the pileated and the three-toed woodpeckers. We found the tapper, and he greeted us with a mocking 'yank-yank', for it was only a lusty white-breasted nuthatch tapping on a very hollow limb. Three times we were fooled this way, until we thought this bush must breed a special type of mighty nuthatch. A band of chickadees whistled from the depths of some pines and hemlocks and, as we always follow the chickadees in winter, we scanned them all carefully until Murray found a busy little bird searching a pine limb, making no noise at all, but a fellow-traveller with the chickadees, a red-breasted nuthatch. As we walked along, the sharp call of the pine grosbeaks sounded overhead, and as we came to the edge of the woods, and fields stretched away, a large flock of redpolls swept by, following the boundary of woods and fields, and settling not far away in an alder bog. Two ruffed grouse burst from a cedar and sailed across the fields to another line of evergreens. In the evergreens too were, in all likelihood, the birds we had come to see. Sure enough, in a deep little ravine we first heard the calls we wanted so much to hear--the soft chatter of the crossbills.

As we gazed high up, a flock of thirty or so eddied into the treetops and settled first in a large oak, then in a hemlock. We were delighted, especially when a few of this flock proved to be red crossbills which, though they are called 'common', are really very rare in this region. Their presence had been suspected before we saw them though, for the soft 'cha-cha, cha-cha' of the white-winged crossbills had been punctuated by several high-pitched, clearer, 'kip-kip' notes which are characteristic of the red crossbill. This sight was gratifying but rather disappointing as they were too far off to see the bills and the feeding operations. But now as we wandered about we heard the crossbills--almost all white-winged--everywhere. The woods had become filled with them. Flock after flock was seen. And then all at once we entered a glade where hemlocks the size of Christmas trees stood in ranks around the edge, mantled in snow. Abruptly we came to a halt, warned by the soft chatter ahead. Not twenty feet away scores of these lovely birds were feeding on the seeds of these Christmas evergreens. They did not fly, but, unafraid and trusting, they let us stand and watch. They were intensely busy, fluttering from one cone to another, chattering and working all the time, but not fighting, as there were cones for all. Like little parrots they hung on with one foot or the other, or even by their bills, as they moved about, head up, or head down no matter to them. Their queer crossed bills, very white on most of the birds, were inserted quickly into cones, the cones spread open with a motion like opening a scissors, and the seeds then exposed licked up with the tongue. Most of the birds, to our surprise, were males, brilliantly plumaged. Deep rose and black and white was the white-wing, and brick or

orange-red all over was the red crossbill. Tones of green and grey and yellow marked the females and immatures. All, as they busied themselves with feeding, dislodged the soft mantle of snow from the trees, so that constantly a powdery veil hung before the scene, softening all colours to the delicacy of pastel. Only when these sprites swirled off to other trees out of sight did we feel free to go--we had seen a painting come to life.

In the following letter our fellow-member, Stuart L. Thompson, brings to our attention one of the most interesting of winter sights.

"Have you been watching the sky lately? This month and last we have had the unique spectacle of four fine planets in the sky at one time, three of them quite close together. On any cloudless evening about 6 p.m. the planet Venus is clearly visible in the south-western sky. The background may have the pale yellow glow of the sunset yet undimmed, but still this beautiful bright silvery planet will stand out so conspicuously as to be found at almost the first glance in that part of the sky. Higher in the heavens about due south may be seen the planet Jupiter. Although the sky is somewhat dimmer there and of a bluish cast, being farther from the sunset, yet Jupiter may be easily found by looking upward at an angle of about 45 degrees. Above him and a little to the east shines Mars, a little smaller but the nearest star to Jupiter. Directly east of these we find Saturn, the next bright star. Once these four bodies have been located we can readily find them on any other clear night and of course, as the sky deepens with the approach of night, they all become more visible, in fact unmistakable amid other stars that come into view.

It is interesting to compare these four planets in both colour and apparent size. Venus is by far the largest, far exceeding Jupiter even on the lighter background mentioned. Her colour is bright silvery white. Jupiter, the next in size, is of a clear steady yellow hue; Mars is unmistakable in his ruddy gleam; and Saturn, about the same size as Mars, is of a dull pale yellow light.

During the latter part of December these last three stood out in a straight line. Mars, then Jupiter, and, some five times the distance between these two, to the east, Saturn. Strangely enough the same line projected still further east exactly bisected the full moon. Mars since then has swung out of line, gone above Jupiter, and is approaching Saturn.

Now, here is a test for your eyesight. Try to find these four planets in their respective places before sunset. Venus is plainly visible. Jupiter can be found if one knows exactly where to look. But Mars and Saturn will take careful searching with field-glasses. And even then imagination will deceive you. We cannot promise that you will find these latter two, but many times in years gone by I have seen the sun, Venus, and Jupiter

in the sky at one time. And when at her very brightest, and I have known exactly where to look, I have seen Venus at such hours as 9.30 a.m., 1.30, 3.00 and 4.00 p.m. on clear sunny days when she appeared as a dim pale spot of light on the blue sky."

(S.L.T.)

Miss Grace Malkin, who is now in charge of the Junior Club, would be very grateful if some members of the Senior Club who own cars would volunteer to transport the children of the Junior Club to a maple-sugar bush on a Saturday morning early in March. Here's a chance for you city dwellers to see one of the jolliest features of old Ontario; or, if you do know about sugarings, to renew pleasant childhood experiences. You may even get a "taste" from the past.

Do not forget your subscription to Canadian Nature!

We have been asked to present the following list of members whose names were omitted in the last Newsletter through an unfortunate oversight. As many of these members are of long standing, and all are valued associates, your executive wishes to apologize for this slip.

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|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr W.K.W.Baldwin        | Mr R.S.Clark           |
| Mrs A.C.Cameron         | Dr E.P.Clarkson        |
| Mr A.C.Cameron          | Mr A.L.Cochrane        |
| Miss Margaret D.Cameron | Mr Henry G.Cooper      |
| Mrs A.H.Campbell        | Prof.A.F.Coventry      |
| Mrs R.S.Carman          | Miss E.Creighton       |
| Miss E.S.Caverhill      | Miss Mary Creighton    |
| Miss Winnie Chute       | Miss B.Dowdall         |
|                         | Lt.-Col.S.H.B.Grassett |

Recent Renewals - since December 20,1939

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|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Mr F.H.Emery          | Miss E.Margaret Pennington |
| Miss Kathleen Kinnear | Miss A.E.Pennington        |
| Miss J.E.Lyall        | Mr John Oughton            |
| Mrs W.E.Lyall         | Miss Gertrude Wright       |

New Member - since December 20,1939

Mrs H.Wykes