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ACROSS THE ISLAND

P.E.I. Naturalist Is 'Recognized'

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A MARSHFIELD man, Albert Boswall, who has done a great deal of work breeding and developing several types of water fowl and upland game birds, recently received an interesting proposal from Al Oemings who is probably Western Canada's best known naturalist.

Oemings owns "The Alberta Farm", some 15 miles from Edmonton where he has rare birds and animals he has picked up in many parts of the world. He has, for example, 13 ½ miles of closely woven seven-foot fence to enclose some of his animals.

He developed his enterprise on his own, apparently, without government assistance. Oemings started as a wrestler, made some money, then turned promoter where the dollars came faster, and the effort was much easier on the physique.

THE ALBERTA naturalist became interested in Albert because of his wide experience in breeding and exhibiting Jersey cattle, and also poultry which he exhibited in previous years, in addition to his hobby of breeding and developing the wild birds.

"You and I should be working together. I'm sure you would make a huge success", he told Mr. Boswall in a recent letter.

Mr. Boswall is naturally pleased to get such recognition from a man of Oemings' stature. But right now, he's not interested. It's not long since he purchased the beautiful farmstead, owned formerly by the late Wyle Gibson.

HAD the offer come a couple of years ago after he had lost his barn on a nearby farm, the answer might have been different, because he would like to have the experience of working a few years with a man like Oemings.

Many Kinds Of Wild Fowl On Farm

MR. BOSWALL has Gadwall, Widgeon and Scaup wild ducks. He breeds Canada geese, Snow geese and Blue Snow Geese.

He also breeds Ringneck pheasants and Hungarian partridge. The late Harry Holman of Summerside gave him the first pair of pheasants.

The Hungarians are difficult to raise. "You can't mass produce them," he told me. "They're difficult to match because, like geese, they choose their own mates."

Mr. Boswall raised 20 of the Huns last year from two pairs of breeders that arrived here in cold March temperatures from 80-degree weather in North Carolina. The Huns run \$20 to \$30 for a breeding pair. He keeps Bantam hens to hatch the pheasant and Hun eggs.

HE HAS shipped Canada geese all over Canada - several pairs were sold to Oemings - and in some parts of the United States. Goslings sell at \$15, breeding age birds at \$20 and up. He has brought some in from as far away as South Dakota.

Many geese live 20 years and longer, but they're about four years old before they reproduce. This slow development adds to the difficulty of breeding for improvement, and Mr. Boswall is constantly trying to improve the birds.

He crosses wild ganders with domestic geese. The offspring grows up to 14 pounds, and sell like hot cakes, at a premium price. But they won't reproduce themselves.

I learned only yesterday that Albert has a diploma from Northwestern University, Chicago, Illinois from a short course in Forestry and Wild Life conservation. The likeable Marshfield man puts a lot of effort into his hobby.

Cross Roads Wild Fowl Sanctuary

AND THAT reminds me of a wild fowl sanctuary that's active in season in the Cross Roads district, not far from my home. Proprietor Earl Jenkins tells me about 150 geese used his sanctuary last fall, and stayed until the New Year. The last one lifted for the southward flight on January 3, he recalls.

Mr. Jenkins' pond has been going for a few years and he has some incredible, but rather amusing stories to tell.

All 150 geese had arrived last fall when a passing motorist saw them and in Earl's words "decided on a goose dinner."

The intruder "waded the creek in low shoes and crawling up to the unsuspecting birds emptied his gun into the midst of them."

AND EARL ADDS, and this is the part I get a kick out of "however all he got for his trouble was a pair of wet feet."

My neighbor adds "when asked why he paid no attention to the large signs at hand, he replied, as did another some years ago when he shot five geese, several of them tame callers, "I guess I just lost my head, all I could see was geese."

Next day, "the same array of geese came back to the pond but, after circling for some time, many of them decided it was unsafe to land, and only 40 came down.

Earl adds "the geese stayed all fall and practically disdained the grain fields for the sweet grass that grew in the pasture of the pond. They would feed on grass till afternoon, and then come up to the house and sit out the remainder of the day.

"After a heavy rain, a depression alongside the garage filled with water, and the geese practically lived in it until the water receded. They paid no attention at all to the car coming in, or backing out of the garage beside them. They even knew the family dog and were quite friendly with him.

One Goose Is Always On Guard

"WHEN THE first snow came, they fed on the green grass in the creek bed and all that could be seen on a winter day was a lone black head above the snow line." The geese always have a bird on guard, he explained.

“Let anyone approach the guard”, he told me, “and instantly there would be a black line the entire length of the creek. This made a beautiful sight against the white snow”. Earl added.

Earl recalls another time when he was awakened at night by the sound of a shot gun. Several rounds were fired apparently. Next morning he found a tame gander floating lifeless on the pond.

“HUNDREDS of passers by watched the birds said they received a great deal of pleasure to see so many beautiful wild birds near the highway”, my neighbor tells me. And I can understand their interest.

Publisher Bill Hancox and I were travelling East of Souris one beautiful afternoon last fall, and we were struck by the sight of a large number of wild geese in a pond, not far from the highway. We understood their presence better, though, when John R. MacLean, Speaker of the Legislature, told us it was the Black Pond sanctuary. And there's a place I hope to visit some time later this year.

Bear River Visit Is Anticipated

I ALSO want to visit the Chaisson people, the Bear River family that has turned out so many violin players. I recall attending an old time fiddlers' contest at the Forum (the present Sports Arena) some years ago when memory tells me there were anywhere from five to seven contestants all named Chaisson. I had a note about this family but I'm still looking forward to visiting some of them and bringing their story to you in more detail.

Speaking of Bear River, I recall an old piece of poetry, carried in the Guardian many years ago, about a bear that wandered into that district, stayed for a time, and when last seen was heading back to Nova Scotia “across the shining ice”.

I've forgotten the rest of the verse but I wonder if any people in the area can recall the bear story for me. If so, I'd like to hear from you, and I'll call in for a chat first chance I get.

Eagles Return to Flat River

THE PEOPLE in Flat River have their eagle back again, and the mate is with it. I don't know which is the male, or the female, so I'm avoiding the sex designation.

I'm not going to continue reporting on the big birds, but I thought I'd better get them back together again, after reporting last week they had left the area. And that's where they are, Stewart Ross, MLA told me last night. The two birds are together on the same tree branch which the lone eagle perched on for nearly 20 years.

And that's a long time to wait for a mate even for an eagle.