

GLIDERS OF THE NIGHT

by J. Dan McAskill

Prince Edward Island is the home of 3 species of squirrels, namely, the red squirrel, the chipmunk and the flying squirrel. The former two squirrels are active during the day but the flying squirrel is active only at night. Special adaptations for nocturnal activity include the presence of very large light sensitive eyes and a keen sense of smell. The latter is used in feeding and in locating the 2 to 7 young when they are away from the nest.

The flying squirrel is quite common in mixed woodland on the Island where cavities are available for nesting. It feeds principally on fruits, seeds, buds, tree blossoms, and insects. The young are born in April or May and they are blind and naked at birth. The mother is extremely attentive, and experiments with the southern species have demonstrated a strong "retrieving drive" for young flying squirrels with one mother retrieving 35 baby flying squirrels as they were presented to her.

Contrary to its name, the flying squirrel does not fly. Rather, it glides on loose flaps of skin which extend between the front and back legs. The tail and legs are used to balance the squirrel in flight and to extend the skin folds. The young start gliding between branches at about 7 weeks of age and, through trial and error, reach the dexterity level of the adult which is capable of the mid-air spirals and loops necessary to dodge obstacles in their path.

OSPREY WATCH

by Margaret E. Mallett, Charlottetown

Along the shore a heron flew,
And from a speck on high,
That hovered in the deepening blue,
We heard the fish-hawk's cry.

(From "The Unnamed Lake" by F.G. Scott)

July 30, 1980. The Osprey nest rested atop a live spruce tree on the east side of a tidal river. About two o'clock we had approached the river from the west and had concealed ourselves among evergreens directly across the river from the nest. All was quiet at the nest. Only the mother osprey was in view as she stood guard on the edge of the nest - entirely unsuspecting.

Presently a young osprey thrust up a wing from the depths of the nest. Soon two heads appeared, then a third. The eldest nestling stood up and flapped its wings vigorously - it looked almost full-grown. Now that the youngsters were awake - hungry as usual - Mother Osprey decided to go fishing. In a few minutes back she came with a fish which she tore apart and fed bit by bit to the young

