



Landing a Trapped Muskrat.

Photograph by Bonnycastle Dale.

the mink and the little ones passed like shadows after. All the bright May days she frolics with the young on the river's banks, teaching them how to fish and hunt their prey. To see the white teeth of a mink flash out in the gloom beside a plover's nest means the extinction of the fledglings. Born fighters, these lithe animals can whip many of the larger, slower animals by sheer audacity of attack, but when man follows them they cannot even run fast enough to escape. I have known a boy chase one down and kill it with a small stick. Tenacious as they are of life, one blow on the tip of the nose finishes them. They can also be caught and killed if met any distance from shore. Expert divers though they are, they leave a train of telltale bubbles mounting to the surface as the hair-caught air rises to the surface—as well as the escaping breath. The native, in light basswood canoe, kneeling on one knee and paddling hard, can cut them off, turn them and finally stun the bewildered animal.

We had a fine object lesson of their power of scent. Across the creek we saw a Mississauga swiftly running, he had seen a mink coming up along the river bank. Speeding ahead he set the trap where signs told him the animal would tread. We saw him secret himself, and through the telescope I finally saw the brown body of the mink threading its way through the undergrowth. It came along steadily until about within twenty feet of the Red Man's track and trap. Instantly the head was thrown up, the nostrils dilated and the bright eyes searched the scene. The dreaded scent came freshly to it (ten hours later it would have been dissipated). As if on a pivot the animal turned, leaped onto its back track and was lost in the woods.

GROUNDHOGS AND OTHERS

Many a day we trod and later paddled the highways and byways of these secluded places, deserted by man but populous with animals. We saw the groundhog peer from a hole on the sandy hillside, whistle his queer half-chattering cry and dive below. We watched the daintily marked stoat run with arched back over the stones that bordered the river's shore line. Red, black and grey

squirrels leaped like monkeys from tree to tree. Once we came across a hollow stub, as I climbed to the top a bunch of soft fur leaped into my face, onto my shoulder and fell towards the ground, forty feet below; four more three-part grown youngsters followed and I had an excellent chance of seeing how the flying squirrel "flies." They fell through the air with the four legs outspread, the loose skin that connects the body with the ankle stretched tight looked as if the animal was webbed, if we may use the term. Down they fell, half flying in a long graceful curve; and mounting the end of the part circle described, alighted on a nearby tree much lower than the one they flew or fell from. Unnatural but beautiful they looked as they sped through the air. Those that failed to curve high enough clutched the bark frantically, then ran up to where the adult female sat calling.

THE MUCH-HUNTED MUSKRAT

When Jack Frost retired discomfited northward and all the lakes and rivers, marshes and drowned lands wore a coat of green, when every tree held its nest and each bunch of flag concealed the home of some waterfowl, we paddled along the channels and watched the busy muskrats building their houses. A short half hour they gave us to watch as they never come out until almost sundown and the work of the camera returns a series of nice clouded smudges. Many a night, mosquito-tormented, have we sat watching the suspicious ripple up stream that later broke with the bright-eyed head of a muskrat in the centre, watched them climb out and sit gravely up on some half sunken log, eating the wild onion—the Muskrat Apple of the Mississaugas—holding it between their paws and slowly turning it nibble in sweet content, unconscious that behind the innocent looking screen of sword like points of the dry flags a red man and a white were intently watching. Splash! Another big brown sleek chap emerges from the marsh and creeps rapidly along the log. There is a deep, faint peevish chatter, almost a whine, then the teeth beat on one another like castanets, the brown bodies uprear and the conflict is on. Splashing, whining, tearing one another

(Continued on page 25)