

Nature Study Class—III.

By W. H. MOORE.

What May be Seen in a Plot of Woods.

For our March outing we will go to the woods. A walk of a mile and one-half will take us around a triangle, that is bordered by a variety in the way of scenery and natural conditions. Along one side is a highway, leading through clearings, alder swamps, and mixed woods. Another side takes us along an old lumber road through a dense coniferous woods, across an interval-bordered brook, and up a hill through a mixed growth of deciduous and coniferous trees to a beautiful maple ridge having an undergrowth of striped and mountain maples and hazel bushes. The third side takes us through such growths as the first two sides and across the brook again to the starting point. Having outlined to you the general plan for this trip, which any teacher may vary to suit needs and circumstances, let us start out. We know not how long it will take us, for the length of time will depend upon what we find to study and pass our opinions upon.

There are some of our hardy winter birds in that apple-tree; yes, they are feeding upon the apples that still hang on the branches. At first, when food seems quite plentiful, they feed only upon the seeds of the apples, but later in the season the whole apple is pecked to pieces and eaten. Now just notice how nearly those reddish coloured males resemble in colour the red frozen fruit, and how nearly of the same shade are the females and the branches. These tracks across here are made by the red squirrels as they travel to the same tree for food. In this depth of snow the tracks look like very roughly made H's, the horizontal bar of the letter being very wide. We will not stop to talk squirrel now, as we will take up a study of these fussy little fellows some day when the weather will hardly permit of an excursion in the woods.

Those little punctures in the snow, that look as though some person had been going along putting down the ends of two fingers at intervals of from twelve inches to eighteen inches, in a zig-zag course, are made by our little friend the weasel, as it hunts about fences, stone and brush-piles for mice.

That chickadee over there in that clump of small conifers must have a sore throat, if one were to judge from its call notes! No! that is the voice of the Hudson's chickadee. Its call is rather wheezy and not as clear cut as the notes of the black-capped

chickadee. This species is brown in colour and is much more modest in making our acquaintance than is the black-cap.

Hark! Yes, a woodpecker; let us go see it. In this soft snow and among those conifers we should be able to get close and have a good view. We have not seen a single hairy woodpecker yet on any of our outings! Well, class, if I judge correctly, you will not see one this time either, but we will likely find one when we get to the hardwood ridge. The one here is an arctic three-toed species. Well, after some experience you will learn to distinguish between the tappings of the different kinds of woodpeckers. This species will be found upon a dead conifer, and in colour will be black, with grey or whitish markings on the sides, and if a male, will have a yellow crown. A species much resembling this is found in the northern highlands of New Brunswick. It has white bars across the back, and is known as the American or ladder-backed woodpecker.

Here are new tracks! Not squirrels; they are too neatly made. They are like the weasels' tracks, but much larger! Oh, here! see where it has slid down this bank! It is an otter's track, perhaps. Class, your friend will have to help you out again; the track is not made by an otter just because it slid down this bank. This is a mink's track, and you will sometimes find late in winter where they slide along the surface of the snow. They follow quite closely along the water courses.

Here is a mouse track, like one we saw last month; one of the wood-mice, for see where its tail left a mark along its course. Now, where has it gone? the track ends here; there is no tree for it to jump to, and no hole in the snow where it has burrowed, just some markings at the sides of the last track. This will puzzle our leader. Call him here and get his opinion.

"Here, Mr. M., solve this mystery, please."

Well, last night there was a wood-mouse running along here; then it ceased to run and took to wings and flew away. (The wings belonged to a saw-whet owl, not to the mouse). These markings you saw at the last track were made by the tips of the wings of the little owl as it swooped to pick up the mouse. A jay, you say, would pick up a mouse. Yes, but a jay's wings would leave a different mark in the snow, as the tip is differently shaped and of narrow feathers.

"Tell us more of this owl; this is very interesting."