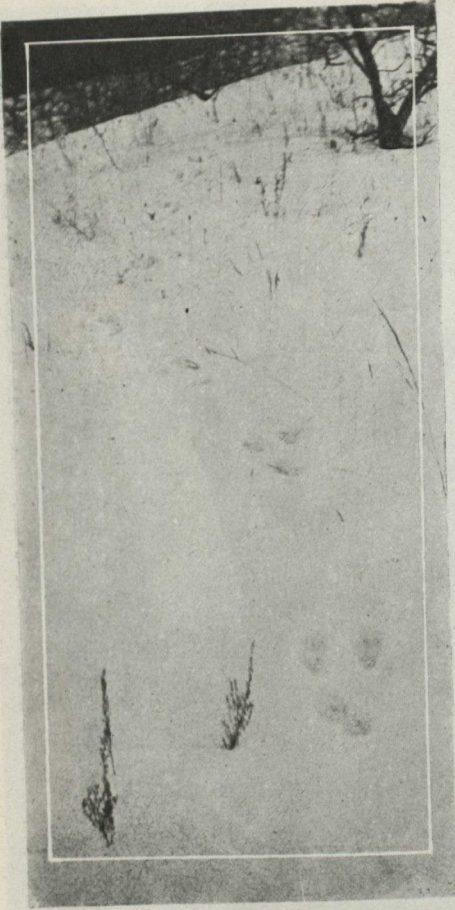




Bunny's early morning calling-card

The same story, too, is in the telling in the marshes and by morning the conquest of the water is complete. At sun-up Sol finds lake and marsh bridged and bound, gleaming darkly or shimmering and reflecting unevenly through the mirage of morning; they are in thrall for a season, and though sometimes the south wind comes up to the rescue and beats back the frost giant a march or two, destroying the new-formed ice-bridges and making general havoc of his works, such happens but rarely.

How variously is this momentous freeze-up time regarded by my neighbours, the wild denizens of these lands. To the winter residents of fur, or feather it is the coming into their

own kingdom; to the others, the tardy camp followers of the autumn, it is a command and no uncertain one to quit the northland. To the wood hares, muskrats, meadow mice, grouse and others the snow mantle means protection and warmth. The hare's white coat, out of place in the brown woods for two weeks or more, now fades into the blue shadows of the willow clumps; the muskrat in his high-heaped house finds a new warm roof to conserve the heat in his clammy apartment; to the meadow mice it is also a warm blanket that heaping upon the tangled grasses leaves a world of tunnels and runways below; and to the grouse the snow is a bed, a warm and dry one. To the mink and weasel and coyote the snow is neither here nor there, perhaps it is little to their liking, but the ice footing gives them liberty to prowl and hunt amongst the rush-clumps that all summer were beyond reach; and always at freeze-up there is much game to be hunted in these same patches.

Down in the timber the pine grosbeak whistles cheerily that winter has come, and he is glad of it. A fluffy whiskey jack (Canada jay) on pillage bent comes into camp and saucily jabbars that the change in the weather is quite to his liking; and the chickadee's notes take on a cheerier, more optimistic tone. Like some apples that are said to attain excellence only where they absorb a pinch of frost, so the black-cap's notes are only at their best when there is a sting in the air. But the very spirit of such fellows is best typified by the newly-arrived snowy owl, ghostly, silent, haunting the marsh, perching on rat-house or snow-capped hay-stack or willow-tuft, a presence as inscrutable as the North itself.

To the others the coming of the ice and snow is a warning, yea more, an order for forced marches into the southland. Now go the hardy ones among the migrants, the fellows fired with an unquenchable love of the North, and they leave it only because