

## Kiwanis To Form New Scout Troop At Adams School

The second new scout troop to be formed under the city's scouting expansion program will be Troop B-25 and is to be sponsored by the Birmingham Kiwanis club, according to Clifford N. Wright, club president.

The troop, which will meet at Adams school, met for the first time Wednesday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m.

Club members Clarence Nichols, Jim Sterling and Charles Swain completed the first phases of the Troop's organization and have announced the troop officers.

They are: Charles E. White, scoutmaster; Robert Dickinson, assistant scoutmaster; John Vanderloot, assistant scoutmaster; James Reading, secretary; Charles Savage, treasurer; Warren Hobbes,

advance; Harry Lewis, outdoors program; Joseph Oby, membership; Al Holmes, training; James Sterling, equipment; and Armand L. Isotte, Neighborhood Boy Scout Commissioner, will work closely with the new troop until it has operated for a few months.

## NATURE NOW

# Winter or Summer 'Coons Are with Us

By LYDIA KING FREHSE  
Special Writer for The Birmingham Eccentric

One of the most unexpected animal encounters I have ever experienced was with a raccoon family.

We were spending Decoration Day weekend in Pokagon state park in northern Indiana.

It was early afternoon and I was following a wooded path taking particular note of the spring ground cover, when I ran head-on into Mrs. Ring-tail and her five families are seldom seen in daylight but this mother was trundling down the path with her young.

They were about the size of half grown kittens, and were following her in an orderly procession. When she saw me she quickly wheeled about, sending her young on before her.

I followed at a discreet distance. Every 15 or 20 feet her mother instinct impelled her to stop, stand up on her hind legs and face me in a threatening manner. She knew that her babies were as yet too small to protect themselves with such usual "coon" tricks as crossing and recrossing a stream or tree and down another. So she repeated her pattern of defiance several times.

SINCE I did not wish to alarm her beyond the point of observing her behavior in this emergency, I soon stood still while the family disappeared around the next turn in the path.

My last sight of them was of five cunning and wobbly little ring-tails being marshalled ahead of a very frightened and protective mother.

The chances are that they had not wandered too far afield from their home, made at a safe distance from the ground in the hollow of an old tree trunk. Here, sometime during April, the babies were born naked and blind and were nursed and tended until they were able to leave the nest for short foraging expeditions.

By mid-October they would be grown to adulthood having in-

night-fall, the baying of dogs is soon heard in the swampy bottom lands.

Eventually the "coon" is "tired". Some member of the party than shakes him out or if this is impossible the tree is cut down and the animal is killed by the dogs. The meat is roasted along with sweet potatoes and apples to make a southern dinner.

Reports from our state conservation department say the raccoon is increasing in numbers and now outstrips the red fox as a predator of poultry and game birds.

They also call for more "coon" hunters to assist nature in keeping that balance of all living creatures which she is forever seeking.

LAST SPRING in Ludington park which had become separated from its mother. Its cry was pitiful, almost like a baby's.

We could do no more than to offer it some food which it refused and then leave it in a protected nook in a stump hoping its mother would somehow find and rescue it. It was a fluffy bit of fur with a cunning ringed tail and a black burglar's mask over its eyes.

The raccoon is common to the whole of the United States. He prefers to live in deciduous woods near civilization. In our own state he is important both as a game animal and as a furbearer. His scientific name Procyon lotor is a clue to one of his most unusual habits.

Lator means "the washer" and he does wash his food before he eats it. It is interesting to see him do this in our own state on a moonlit night. He uses his dextrous front paws like hands, refusing to eat until he has washed a morsel in or out of the water. He then tears off a bit with his sharp teeth and finally washes his feet when he has finished his meal.

ALTHOUGH HE prefers meat and dislikes herbage, the raccoon is an omnivorous eater. He is especially fond of raiding corn fields where he eats the ears while they are in the milk-stage.

He is most destructive to poultry and game birds' nests. A coon will scratch in the earth to find insects and worms and he will eat any small rodent or reptile he can find.

However he is at his best on some moonlit night, shuffling along while he sniffs the moist earth on the bank of a muddy stream. Here, he finally dips a long-fingered paw into the water to fish out a minnow, a crayfish or a fresh water mussel.

He is especially fond of pokeberries and wild grapes but when prowling about on land will eat almost any kind of fruit.

THE COMMON name "racoon" is of Indian origin and means "he who scratches with his hands." When walking along snowy or muddy bank I have often marvelled at the resemblance of his tracks to a tiny baby's hand and foot.

Most animals like cats and dogs bend their feet to throw their weight forward, thus making only a "toe" track.

This style of walking is called "digitigrade." But a raccoon walks flat-footed like a bear, leaving the imprint of his entire sole. He walks "plantigrade."

During the winter when many of our four-footed friends lie in a deep hibernating sleep, the raccoon is usually up and about his mischievous tricks. He retreats to his den for short periods only when driven there by the severest cold and the heaviest snows.

The raccoon is one of the most nocturnal of North American mammals. In the southeastern states night time is "coon-time."

Here coon hunting and its attendant breeding of "hound" dogs, is a kind of natural sport for young and old alike.

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