New Attraction at Chicot Park

A BOBCAT stalks a heron, a rattlesnake pounces to strike an advancing mink, and a wood duck stands guard over his mate's nest.

No, you're not in the woods. You're in the Chicot wildlife museum at Chicot State Park, looking at dioramas created by W. Clay Watson. Watson was specially trained for the state parks and recreation commission. The recently opened museum is situated six miles north of Ville Platte.

The diorama exhibits are now housed on the second floor of the park's administration building and library. "Eventually," says Watson, "we hope to expand the exhibit to such an extent that they will fill the entire building. The administration section would then be transferred to new quarters."

IN ALL, there are five dioramas, and they are the main feature of the museum. But there are other exhibits, too.

"One case holds eggs of North American meagrets and waterfowl," says Watson. "This collection was presented to the Chicot wildlife museum as a gift by Dr. George Lowery, director of the biological museum at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge."

"We also have an Indian exhibit, containing items collected at Prehistoric Indian Park, near Marksville, and various other displays on topics ranging from water-hyacinth control to conservation."

Chicot Park, a popular vacation spot in Central Louisiana, covers 6,500 acres, of which 5,000 are occupied by Lake Chicot. Thousands of people visit the park each year to make use of camping facilities and overnight cabins.

Will the popularity of the park rub off on the museum? "It's too early to tell how successful the museum will be," says Watson. "But I think the potential is indicated by the results of a short story in the Ville Platte paper which announced that the museum was nearing completion."

"Over 30 cars drove up the Sunday after the story appeared. Ironically enough, I couldn't let anybody in. I was spreading poison in the dioramas to protect the stuffed animals and birds."

"But that will probably be the only day in the history of the museum on which visitors were not welcome."

Photos by Fred C. McPherson

Stalking bobcat eyes green heron lunch in this realistic diorama, one of five which are featured at wildlife museum in Chicot Park. The wood duck guards over nest, trunk turns to show female nesting.