

SHOULD WE SAVE THE WILD BIRDS?

Study of Their Food Habits Shows That They Are Our Friends.

MY LADY'S FINE PLUMES

Have Usually Cost Some Beautiful Bird Its Life and Starved All The Nestlings.

Observation of bird ways is the first step toward bird protection. A knowledge of bird life is the sure means of arousing interest and admiration of our feathered friends. It is soon discovered that they are indeed our best helpers, and that they work in our interest, and that they work in our interest, and that they work in our interest.

and the task is almost completed. The way to a bird's heart is through its crop. Place at the same hour each day on a high window sill or shelf that cats cannot reach, any table scraps of meat, vegetables, and bread, all chopped fine, also some crushed or broken grain, and above all bits of raw suet as it comes from the butcher, and the birds will come as regular visitors, and will finally remain. Provide fresh water daily in a shallow, rough earthen dish, for their drinking and bathing. They need a great deal of food. A young bird can eat an amount equal to its weight each day. The catbird will eat 30 grasshoppers for breakfast, and in a few hours be ready for as many more. It is the business of these birds to destroy insects. They



THE EGRET OF FLORIDA.

The splendid Snowy Heron, which is being rapidly exterminated in the south, because ladies pay high prices for its feathers.

are nature's machinery to prevent our being devoured alive by the crawling myriads. For every cherry the catbird eats, he has eaten at least a thousand insects. The robin eats the cawker worms of apple trees and the cut worms which kill the corn. The bluebird flies down from his perch every few minutes to pick up crickets and grasshoppers. Woodpeckers find the grubs in the inside of the trees. Orioles go over the fruit trees and pick out the tiny insects under the leaves and when they find great nests on the branches, they tear them open and kill the caterpillars that made them. Swallows are almost always catching gnats and flies.

THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD.

Most to be commended of all our birds as to food habits is the western bluebird. Not only do the bluebirds feed principally upon insects, but they prefer caterpillars, and so rid us of much insect life in its most obnoxious form.

The bluebird does not steal fruit or farm crops. 75 per cent of its food consists of insects and 25 per cent of the following seeds: Blackberry, chokeberry, juniperberry, pokeberry, part-ridgeberry, greenbrier, Virginia creeper, hollyhock, holly, strawberry bush, false saskenard, wild sarsaparilla, sun-unc (several species), rose haw, sotol, ragweed, grass, and asparagus. This list shows how little the bluebird depends upon the farm or garden to supply its needs, and indicates that by encouraging the growth of some of these plants, many of which are highly ornamental, the bird may be induced to make his home on the premises.

In the systematic arrangement of the birds of America, the bluebird has been placed at the head of the list, the highest in point of development. In its food habits, considered in their economic relations, and in its general behavior toward the human race, the bird occupies a similar position.

Whenever, therefore, the delicate plumage of one of these beautiful birds of ours graces the hat of one of our ladies we know that a most useful bird has been needlessly sacrificed to the purpose of personal adornment, and that somewhere a million crawling insects are multiplying in safety because of the removal of their destroyer. But speaking of bird plumes—that reminds us of something.

DO LADIES KNOW?

Most ladies do not know, perhaps, that the egret feathers worn in their hats and which their milliners assure them were made from the commonest feathers, are actually taken from the back of the snowy heron, or white egret, of Florida, and that to get these feathers a cruelty of slaughter is practiced that no lady would willingly abet or encourage if she knew the facts about it.

To obtain these plumes at their best, they must be taken during the nesting season, when they are brightest, just when the young birds are fully fledged but not yet able to fly. At that time the solitude of the parent birds is greatest, and forgetful of their own danger, they are readily made the victims. And when the killing is finished, and the few handfuls of coveted feathers have been picked out, the slaughtered birds are left in a white heap to fester in the sun and wind in sight of their helpless young that cry for food and are not fed. "There is nothing," writes Hudson, "in the whole earth so pitiable as this—so pitiable and so shameful—that for such a purpose human cunning should take advantage of that feeling and instinct which we regard as so noble in our own species and as something sacred—the tender passion of the parent for its offspring, which causes it to neglect its own safety and to perish miserably, a sacrifice to its love."

THE SHAME OF IT.

The shyest, most secretive birds lose all their wild instincts in their overmastering anxiety for their young. And when the poor bird, uttering piercing cries, its sensitive frame quivering, its bill gaping, as if the air could no longer sustain it in its intense agitation,



THE WESTERN BLUEBIRD.

The best of our native species, now rarely seen here because of the murderous warfare that has been waged upon it. Drawn for this article from nature by a student of the State Normal.

and fluttering its lovely wings to make them more conspicuous, and by such means to draw the danger away from its treasures and on to itself—when it has been ruthlessly shot for its feathers, its fledglings are left to starve in the nest. And if to the starved young we add all the birds that fly away with pellets of lead in their bodies to languish and die of their wounds. It would be no exaggeration to say that for every plume worn in a lady's hat, ten birds have suffered the death pang. It is not uncommon for one hunter to kill as many as a hundred birds in a day for days in succession. Eye witnesses tell of hundreds of broken eggs and piles of dead, half-decayed bodies of young birds in the nests, upon a single island of Florida thus decimated of its white herons.

MANIA FOR PLUMES.

The mania for egret plumes is very great. The lady asks her milliner, who looks to the wholesale houses; and the latter looks to the plumage hunter. In the spring the hunter journeys far into the southern swamps, when the busy life of the bird colony is at its height. The parent egret has been out after food and is just returning. Without a second's hesitation he picks out his own nest and the hundreds and hundreds of eggs and young birds in the world, though he never misses his nest by an inch. His plumes flare up and the hunter notes them—they are just "ripe" and in prime condition. Surely the hunter, concealed in a tree yonder, is not going to kill these birds right in the nesting season, when the helpless young are in their nests and must die if their parents die. This cannot be possible, you say. Yet that is precisely what he is going to do. It is not his fault, he will tell you, that the plumes are not good in fall, winter, or early spring. During the nesting season they are worth at their best \$40 an ounce. Only the fact remains that the gathering of plumes is a harvest of death; but "my lady" must have the feathers. "White," writes Hough, "they are white, these plumes. It is mockery. They should be the blackest sable, and

they should stain black the hands that carve them. An egret raises herself above the rim of the nest on which she sits, and a tiny bullet pierces her. She whirls down lying white and motionless. The little ones gape and cry, but no food comes. The father was killed on a tree nearby. One by one, out of the nests, off the limbs of the trees, here, there, anywhere—for they are so stupid with the breeding fever that they will not leave—the slender birds meet their doom. Two hundred carcasses of egrets are left lying. That many more tomorrow, and next day. By that time the wailing of the dying young of the first day's victims will have ceased. Not a bird young or old is left alive. The old ones stayed till death came, bound by the great instinct of nature to remain with their young."

THE ENGLISH SPARROW.

However, there is a class of wild birds which under present conditions it is not wrong to kill. On the contrary, it appears that if we are to keep the other birds about our homes, the English sparrows should be exterminated. They are not valuable as weed and insect destroyers, and they drive off other birds. They break up the nests and devour the eggs of robins, bluebirds, swallows, song sparrows, and other kinds. They begin nesting in February or March, pre-empting the best places before the other birds arrive. They rear five or six broods each season and so increase with incredible rapidity. In ten years, barring accident a pair might produce 275,715,938,698 sparrows. Yet children should not be taught to kill them. They will kill only a few at best, but will get the killing habit, and will then fail to discriminate between the sparrow and the other birds.

Sparrows may be entrapped in large numbers during the winter by leaving open the door of closed chicken runs and placing a little grain therein. Then they can be shut up and fed poisoned grain. The formula is one-eighth of an ounce of powdered strychnine sulphate in half a pint of boiling water. Pour this while hot over two quarts of wheat and stir well. Dry thoroughly without scorching, and put away in some safe receptacle labeled "Poisoned Grain—Strychnine." One grain will kill a

sparrow, so that a quart of wheat might get rid of 20,000. Expose the grain in winter, where poultry and pigeons cannot get it; but feed good grain at first, for sparrows are suspicious. It is best to expose the poisoned grain during dry weather only; for if the grain is moist, the birds taste the strychnine and disgorge the grain. Encourage them to feed a few days before giving them the poisoned grain. First sweep up the good grain, and feed the other after a heavy snow storm. A few persons can then rid a whole village of these pests, and other birds will soon come in if not menaced by the hostile acts of cats and children.

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HUNTING WATER IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Drilling for water in Cape Colony for stock breeding and purposes of irrigation was first undertaken by the government for the farmers at minimum cost of drilling the wells, and the work is undertaken by contractors who have their own drilling machinery and employ most of the men previously trained by the government for operating the machines. The equipment used for drilling is mostly the jumper drill type. Several of these are of American manufacture.

A Cape Town concern is now manufacturing a drilling machine which is proving a dangerous competitor. The total cost is \$2,283, including boiler and engine, or \$1,553 without power plant. It is constructed entirely of metal, thereby resisting the weather. It is thought that the American machines, having considerable wood in their construction, do not withstand the weather as well as the all-metal ones, and our manufacturers might give this attention. The average depth to which it is usually necessary to drill is about 300 feet, at an average cost of \$3.50 per foot. The statement is made that the new Cape Town machine has drilled as much as 125 feet in sixty-four hours, all rock drilling. It is designed to drill a six-inch hole to a depth of 500 feet with a steam power percussion drill.

The owners of large farm properties find American-made drilling machines, and also windmills, preferable to those of British manufacture, because the parts are standardized, making it easy to replace parts, and that the claim of the British manufacturer that his machines were supported in higher prices by greater lasting powers was not a

good contention. The American machines lasted quite long enough, and better results could be obtained by replacing them every five or six years with newer types, their lower cost permitting this to be done.

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