

CHOICE IS BIRDS OR CRAWLING THINGS

Protection of Feathered Tribe
The Antidote for Worms
and Weeds.

NATIVE SPECIES BENEFICIAL.

But the English Sparrow and the Domestic Cat do More Harm Than Good.

The training section in nature study at the university has been investigating this week the relations between birds and weeds, insects, fruits, and grains.

The best method of studying our native birds is by using a camera or an opera glass. To record the results of our observations is excellent, for "a pencil is the best of eyes."—Agassiz. The worst way of studying birds is with a gun or flipper, or with a stone or club for throwing. Excepting only the English sparrow, which is a national nuisance and ought to be exterminated, none of our native wild birds should be killed. No nest of any wild species should be harmed.

BIRDS ARE OUR ALLIES.

Birds are the great insect and weed destroyers. As fly catchers, gnat and worm consumers, and as devourers of the seeds of weeds, pests that would otherwise overrun our fields and lawns, the birds are our main source of aid in combatting these myriad-ranged foes. Without the aid of birds, it is doubtful whether or not we should be able to win this battle for life. In the last half a century, the native birds have been greatly reduced in numbers and their places have been taken by the English sparrow. Insect species have multiplied into swarming millions, which occasionally cause the destruction of entire crops over wide areas. As the native birds decrease, the insect vermin increase. So with the weeds. In all cases more than one species. The choice that any people must make in this matter is either to



THE ROBIN.

The American species (merula migratoria) is not the robin of the old world, which is smaller and is a singer. The "June Grass" was drawn for this article by an Eighth grade pupil of the training school; the bird by a normal student.

protect the birds or to live with the bugs, worms and nameless insect tribes, and to fight with the weed pests. Let there be no mistake here. This is the situation. It is either birds or bugs and other crawling things. With a reckless indifference, the people of America have closed their eyes and understandings to the esthetic sense of beauty and of intellectual pleasure that accompany the presence of bird plumage and wood notes, and have shot, hunted, trapped, all but exterminated every beautiful winged creature within reach.

WHAT TWO ROBINS COULD DO.

But while there is life, there is hope. One pair of robins may produce 10 young in one year; and if these should go on increasing free from molestation by enemies and accidents, they might produce in 10 years 129,823,323 birds of their kind—enough to exterminate most of the insect pests in any wide neighborhood. If we should not only let the robins alone, but also rear and train them, they would render us still greater service and a very delightful companionship as well. But it is fancied by some and asserted by others that the robin is a thief and steals fruit, etc. It is true that in the absence of wild fruits which the robin ate before man removed the native forests and shrubbery, the robin does eat a few cherries and currants, but let us see what the facts are before we begin to condemn the robins.

FOOD OF THE ROBIN.

The robin eats fruits, to be sure; but an examination of 100 stomachs shows that over 42 per cent of the food of this bird is animal matter, principally

insects, while the remainder is made up largely of small wild fruits, berries, grasshoppers, etc. Of the vegetable food 47 per cent consisted of wild fruits, and only 4 per cent, on the average, consisted of cultivated kinds, except in June and July, when the latter proportion reached 25 per cent of the vegetable food eaten. The robin eats wild fruit all the year round—dogwood, wild cherries, wild grapes, greenhills, holly, cranberries, blueberries, buckberries, barberries, service berries, and weed seeds. The early cherry is the cultivated fruit that suffers most, because it ripens at a time when it is almost the only fruit accessible. The department at Washington thus summarizes the case of the robin:

PROVIDE FOR THE ROBIN.

"In view of the fact that the robin takes 10 times as much wild as cultivated fruit, it seems unwise to destroy the birds to save so little. Nor is this necessary, for by a little care both birds and fruit may be preserved. Where much fruit is grown, it is no great loss to give up one tree to the birds, and in some cases the crop can be protected by scarecrows. Where wild fruit is not abundant, a few fruit-bearing shrubs and vines judiciously planted will serve for ornament and provide for the birds. The Russian mulberry is a vigorous grower, and the fruit is not abundant at the same time as the cherry. So far as observation has gone, most birds seem to prefer its fruit to any other. It is be-

lieved that a number of mulberry trees planted around the garden or orchard would furnish the more valuable fruits. It is, moreover, a remarkable fact that the wild fruits, upon which the birds feed largely, are those which man neither gathers for his own use nor adopts for cultivation."

THE MOURNING DOVE.

The mourning dove, in some respects our most beautiful species, is a slow breeder, rearing only two young at a time. The department of agriculture has found that the food of the dove consists of seeds of weeds, together with some grain. The examination of the contents of 237 stomachs shows that over 99 per cent of the food consists wholly of vegetable matter, less than 1 per cent being animal. Wheat, oats, rye, corn, barley and buckwheat were found in 150 of the stomachs, and constituted 32 per cent of the total food. However, three-fourths of this amount was waste grain picked up in the fields after the harvesting was over. Of the various grains eaten, wheat is the favorite, and is almost the only one taken when in good condition. Most of it was eaten in the months of July and August. Corn, the second in amount, was all old, damaged grain, taken from the field after the harvest or from roads or stock yards in summer. The principal and most constant diet, however, is the seeds of weeds. These are eaten at all seasons of the year. They constitute 64 per cent of the annual food supply, and show very little variation during any month. Some of the seeds eaten were so minute that it seemed that none but the smallest species of birds would eat them, and then only when driven to do so by lack of other food. In one stomach 7,599 seeds of the yellow wood sorrel, in another 6,199 seeds of barn-grass or foxtail, and in a third 9,299 kinds of seeds none of them useful and most of them noxious and weedy plants. By our law doves may be killed from Aug. 15 to Dec. 1. But this open season is probably too long and should be shortened to Nov. 1.

THE MEADOW LARK.

A well known species is the meadow lark. Animal matter constitutes 73 and vegetable 23 per cent of its food. Crickets and grasshoppers are the most important of the insects eaten, making up in July and August 69 per cent of this bird's food. Beetles, a few of them useful ones, and caterpillars make up the next largest item. Grain, weeds and other hard seeds are eaten, the first mostly in winter and spring and therefore simply waste kernels. Thus, more than half of the meadow lark's food consists of harmful insects; its vegetable food is composed either of noxious weeds or waste grain, and the remainder is made up of useful beetles or neutral insects and spiders. A strong point in the bird's favor is that, although naturally an insect eater, it is able to subsist on vegetable food and consequently is not forced to migrate in cold weather farther than is necessary to find ground free from snow.



THE MEADOW LARK.

The singing bird of our fields (sturnella magna). Drawn for this article from museum specimen by a normal student; the sunflower by an Eighth grade pupil of the training school.

APPLICATION IN SCHOOLS.

From the relations of the birds to the insects and the weeds and to the school garden in which he is rearing plants, the child may learn the class of facts. When he finds out that the tiger-beetle and the dragon-fly, the lady-bug and the toad are helpful in plant rearing and should be encouraged and protected simply because they preserve his plants by destroying their insect enemies, he will have still less inclination to harm a bird that destroys the insect or weed enemies of his growing plants. The boy who has seen a robin taking injurious insects from his garden to feed its young will hardly shy a rock at it on the sly, even if it does eat a few cherries in the spring. And when he finds his pet cat with a favorite bird in its mouth, he begins to learn that this is an enemy in disguise. "Let us hope," writes Trout, "that after a little education of this sort for the rising generation, we may not always have the same difficulty in getting rid of the cat nuisance, whose assistance in scattering disease is more objectionable even than its destruction of birds." All wild or stray cats should be mercifully put out of the

way. None but well-fed household pets should be permitted to live. Mice are more easily and more economically disposed of in other ways than with cats.

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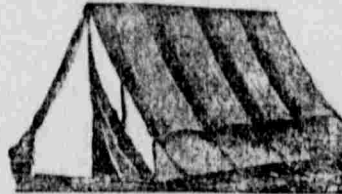


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