

# NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH



IRENE GROSVENOR WHEELOCK

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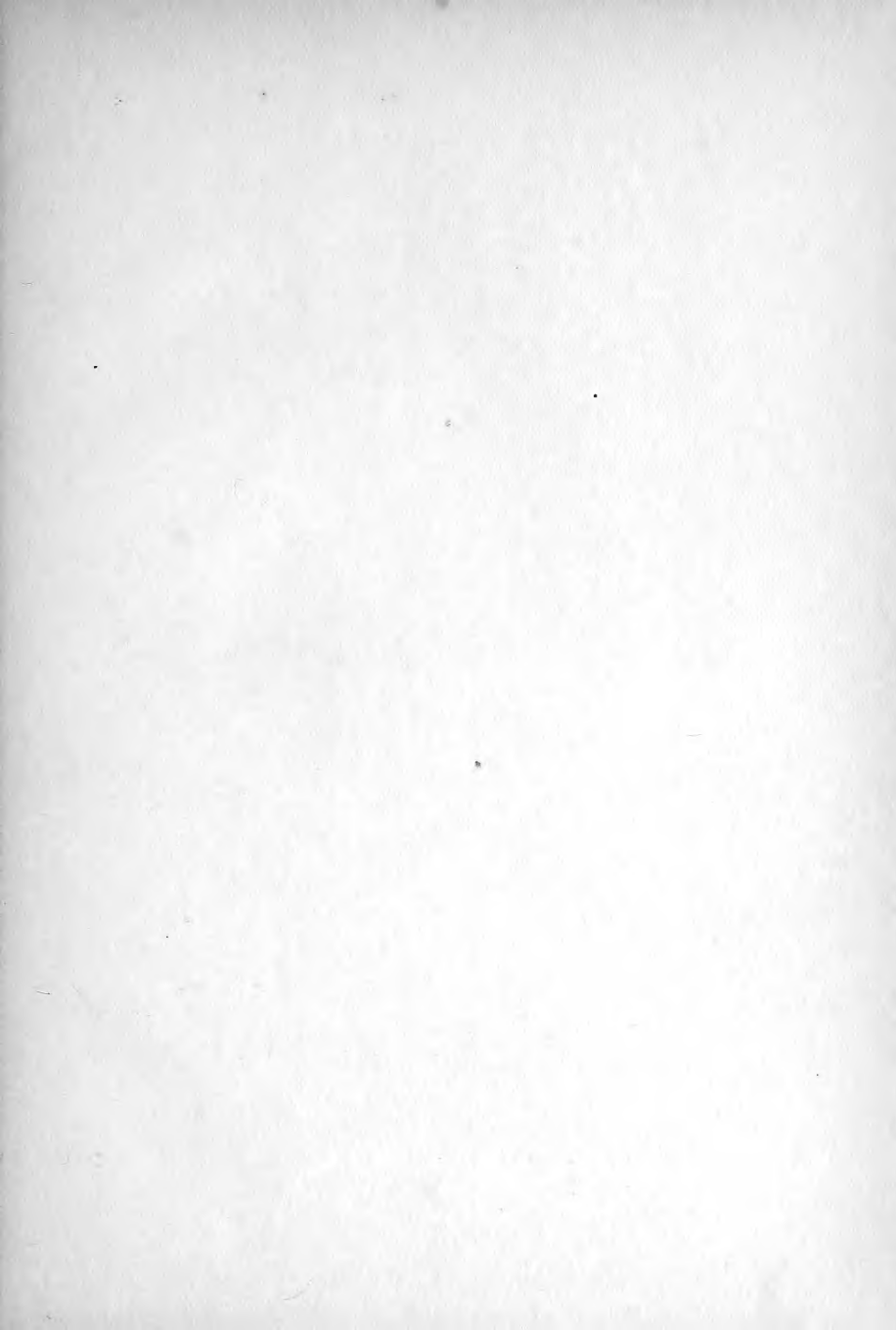
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NESTLINGS OF FOREST  
AND MARSH









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# NESTLINGS

OF

## FOREST AND MARSH

By  
IRENE GROSVENOR WHEELOCK



*With Twelve Full-Page Photogravures and many Illustrations in the  
text from Original Photographs from Nature by  
Harry B. Wheelock*

CHICAGO  
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1902



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PUBLISHED MARCH, 1902.

TO  
MY OWN NESTLINGS  
SARA AND LOYAL



O it is something  
To be taken out of the fuss and strife  
Of the singular mess we agree to call life:

To be set down on one's own two feet  
So nigh to the great warm heart of God  
You almost seem to feel it beat  
Down from the sunshine and up from the sod;  
To be compelled, as it were, to notice  
All the beautiful changes and chances  
Through which the landscape flits and glances;  
And to see how the face of common day  
Is written all over with tender histories.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL



## FOREWORD

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WHILE not a scientific treatise, in the sense of being technical, this book claims to be as accurate as careful observation in the field, with and without a glass, can make it. It has been written from my own notes gleaned during several years of study of the nesting habits of our familiar birds, and some not quite so well known. In the case of the red-winged blackbird the double nest was made by another pair of birds in a different marsh, and was shown to me. It contained one egg in the lower part, exactly as described. With this one exception, I have chosen to relate only those incidents which have come under my personal observation, knowing well that nothing is recorded which any one with the same amount of patience, leisure, and love of the subject might not have seen for himself. The individuality of these "Little Brothers of the Air" has not, in any case, been exaggerated; for birds of the same species differ in habits and song as much as do individuals of the human kind, and to know them is an endless study. So far as reading human characteristics into animal life is concerned, can any one tell where

## FOREWORD

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the brute ends and the human begins? Many of the emotions of man's heart find their counterpart in the life of birds. That we do not perceive this proves only how dull is our sight.

“To him who in the love of Nature holds  
Communion with her visible forms, she speaks  
A various language.”

We hear and interpret according to the keenness of our own ears.

IRENE GROSVENOR WHEELOCK.

CHICAGO, January, 1902.



## CONTENTS

---

	PAGE
A PIONEER . . . . .	17
A MAY MOVING . . . . .	29
EL CAPITAN . . . . .	42
A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES . . . . .	52
A MARTINET IN FEATHERS . . . . .	62
JIM'S BABIES . . . . .	77
PHÆBES AND THEIR COUSINS . . . . .	90
THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL . . . . .	99
A FOSTER BABY . . . . .	111
MARSH CRADLES . . . . .	121
A MARSH MYSTERY . . . . .	134
SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER . . . . .	144
THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES . . . . .	158
THE HOUSE THAT FELL . . . . .	170
DR. JEKYLL . . . . .	180
CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS . . . . .	191
MONSIEUR MISCHIEF . . . . .	207
A BROWN THRASHER . . . . .	224
CŒUR DE LION . . . . .	238
A WOOD THRUSH . . . . .	243
YELLOW WARBLER . . . . .	250





## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

	Page
Three-weeks-old blackbirds . . . . .	<i>Title-page</i>
Young catbirds . . . . .	<i>Headpiece</i>
Baby long-billed marsh wrens and nest . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Prairie horned lark's nest at foot of a corn-stalk (Plate I.) . . . . .	17
Meadow lark's nest and eggs, with sheltering grasses removed . . . . .	21
Bluebird's nest in hollow tree . . . . .	30
Bluebird's nest in cavity of a fence-post . . . . .	33
Baby bluebirds, twelve days old . . . . .	35
“ Are you satisfied with this pose, Mr. Photographer?”	37
“ We are so hungry ” . . . . .	40
Red-winged blackbirds about two weeks old (Plate II.)	42
Red-wing's nest in rushes . . . . .	45
Young red-wing blackbirds in nest . . . . .	48

## ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Yellow-headed blackbirds two weeks old in nest (Plate III.) . . . . .	52
Home of yellow-headed blackbird . . . . .	53
Young clinging to edge of nest . . . . .	56
Baby robins, eighteen days old . . . . .	64
Robin, six weeks old . . . . .	68
Taking a sun-bath . . . . .	72
Crow's nest in crotch of a tree (Plate IV.) . . . . .	77
Olive-green eggs, spotted with black . . . . .	79
Phœbe's nest and young . . . . .	91
Baby pewee fast asleep . . . . .	93
Dainty nest of the wood pewee . . . . .	97
The beautiful and the grotesque . . . . .	101
Fluffy baby orioles . . . . .	105
Contentment . . . . .	108
Baby chickadee emerging from nest (Plate V.) . . . . .	111
Location of chickadee's nest . . . . .	114
"Two is company" . . . . .	125
A handful of babies . . . . .	130
Sora rail's nest and eggs . . . . .	136
A baby rail . . . . .	138
Immature sora rail . . . . .	141
Nest of spotted sandpiper exposed (Plate VI.) . . . . .	144
Sandpiper's nest, skilfully concealed . . . . .	146
Sandpiper's babies, hiding on the sand . . . . .	148
A spry little "teeter" . . . . .	150
Baby quail in the hand . . . . .	152

## ILLUSTRATIONS

---

	Page
Kildeer and young one day old . . . . .	154
Kildeer startled, and about to run . . . . .	156
Young flickers leaving the nest (Plate VII.) . . . . .	158
Squirring flicker babies, two days old . . . . .	162
Young red-headed woodpecker leaving nest . . . . .	171
On the lookout . . . . .	174
Dr. Jekyll . . . . .	172
Nest and eggs of the jay . . . . .	184
One of the jay's victims : nest of swamp sparrow . . . . .	186
Nests devastated by jays . . . . .	188
Chimney swift's nest and eggs (Plate VIII.) . . . . .	191
" We want our mama " . . . . .	195
Nest of barn swallow . . . . .	201
Nest and eggs of catbird in a bush (Plate IX.) . . . . .	207
Catbirds three weeks old : The same, two weeks later . . . . .	209
A tilt between a bluebird and a catbird, each four weeks old . . . . .	215
The same birds as in preceding cut, showing progress in feathering and relative growth . . . . .	220
Nest and eggs of thrasher in thorn-bush (Plate X.) . . . . .	224
Nest of thrasher on the ground . . . . .	225
Thorn-bush, the thrasher's favorite nesting-place . . . . .	227
Baby thrashers, ten days old . . . . .	232
Hair-bird's nest, in same thorn-bush . . . . .	235
Young hair-birds and undeveloped egg . . . . .	236
A tyrant fledgling . . . . .	241
A nest of mud and grasses . . . . .	244

F  
ILLUSTRATIONS

---

	Page
Young wood thrushes and cowbird . . . . .	246
Nesting-place yellow warbler in low shrub (Plate XI.)	250
Wee yellow warbler nestlings . . . . .	255
Young catbird . . . . .	257







# NESTLINGS

OF

## FOREST *and* MARSH



### A PIONEER

Ere a leaf is on a bush,  
In the time before the thrush  
Has a thought about its nest,  
Thou wilt come with half a call,  
Spreading out thy glossy breast  
Like a careless prodigal ;  
Telling tales about the sun,  
When we 've little warmth, or none.

WORDSWORTH.

**T**HROUGHOUT the tract lying along the lake shore north of Chicago, the real herald of Spring is the meadow lark. The bluebird lingers among the sugar maples south and west of us; the robin shuns the chill lake winds as long as possible; but in spite of wind and weather, the meadow lark seeks his old familiar haunts in his appointed time. Not only is he the first to come, but the first to sing. Even

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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amid snow and ice I have heard his clear piping whistle on the sheltered lowland meadows about the Skokie marshes. It is neither so jubilant nor so oft-repeated as when, under the sunny April skies, he pours out the rapture of his love song; but, like the first Spring blossom, it is the promise of joy to come.

In this latitude February sunshine is a snare and a delusion. "A whiff of Spring to-day is buried under two feet of snow to-morrow." Hunger drives the sturdy winter residents of the forest to seek food among the homes of men. Many perish from starvation. Brave indeed must he be who voluntarily leaves a land of plenty for such precarious surroundings. And brave he was. Though often cold and hungry, with the courage of faith he never failed to sing "Spring 'll be here!" on every bright day.

What the little hero found to eat was a mystery, until he was one day discovered robbing a field-mouse's store of grain. On another occasion, seeing him busy on top of

## A PIONEER

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an old stump, I ungraciously interrupted his breakfast, and found that it consisted of ants that were devouring the remains of a squirrel's hoard of nuts. Undoubtedly he was also finishing the feast. At another time he was flushed suspiciously near a number of empty snail-shells that bore evidence of having been recently broken into. Now, I have no proof that he was responsible for the destruction of the snails, as I believe it may have been the work of downy woodpeckers, but the meadow lark was feeding at the same spot on something, and snails were the only food in sight.

Usually he slept cuddled under the long marsh grass close to a hummock ; but more than once I have startled him from the friendly shelter of a brush pile, and once from the low crotch of a tree. For a long time he was the sole one of his kind in that meadow, and seemed to covet the society of a pair of horned larks who were always to be found there. Day after day he fed with them on the wet roadway, and the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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companionship seemed to be mutually agreeable, for they followed where he flew until their early family cares absorbed them. Two broods of young horned larks were raised in this meadow in March and May, respectively. The third nest was made in a cornfield in July. It was merely a slightly hollowed-out place at the base of a corn hill.

In early March, two more male meadow larks appeared, and a few days later a soberly gowned female came alone. She was at once the object of much attention. The way to a man's heart may be, as cynics aver, through his stomach; but among feathered folk this rule is reversed, and many a ladylove is won by edible dainties.

With the mercury at zero fat worms are scarce, and Madam coquettishly encouraged the efforts of her three suitors. There seemed to be no quarrelling for her favor, but each one laid his hunting trophies at her feet or called her to share an especially rich find. After several weeks of living thus on the fat of the land, she made a choice, not

## A PIONEER

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on account of brighter plumage or sweeter song,—no, it was merely, as I believe, a question of greater hustling after bugs. About this time the other suitors seemed to disappear from that meadow, and all the Spring it was occupied by this one pair.

About the middle of May a rude nest of grasses, partly arched over, was made in a small depression in the ground. When we discovered it there were five eggs, white thickly speckled with brown, lying in two parallel rows, three on one side and two on the



Meadow lark's nest and eggs, with sheltering grasses removed

other. In order to photograph the nest we were obliged to disturb the overarching grasses a little, and this disclosed it all too plainly to its enemy, the crow.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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When we next visited it, every egg was gone.

The parents seemed to connect us in some way with the catastrophe, and were much more wary in concealing the second nest, which they made in a near-by meadow. So jealously did the long grass guard their secret that we could find no trace of it until the young birds were hatched and partly feathered. In fact, it was only the great anxiety of the parents that betrayed them. We lay down flat on our faces in the long grass on top of the hill, and with field glasses and patience at length located the nest. The mother bird flew from it to a tree fifty feet away, looked about nervously, and then darted swiftly to a boggy place for slugs. Soon she was back in the tree with her mouth full of food for the nestlings, and, after another hurried look around for danger, went directly to the nest. In a few moments she repeated this manœuvre, and, as long as we watched her, made the trip every ten minutes. It may be she suspected danger,

## A PIONEER

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for not once did she come or go without first resting in the tree for a look-out.

Meanwhile the mate had not ceased to utter a peculiar note of warning and distress. His part was to guard, not to feed, and from a fence post on the opposite side he kept faithful watch. Sometimes, pressed by hunger, he went down into the deep grass to feed, but his little head was ever stretched up on the look-out for danger, and restlessly he called, "Pe ent, pe ent."

The mother alone seemed to take food to the nest, and from her movements seen through a field glass I judged much of this consisted of grasshoppers. She carried some of it from the bog, but a great deal was caught in the clover near the nest. We could see her stop and stretch up suspiciously to look about, and could watch her snap the bug, then start on a run under cover to the young. She seemed to kill the larger insects by tossing them up and catching them several times in her beak.

Having satisfied ourselves as to where the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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nest lay, the next thing was to find it, in the centre of a ten-acre meadow. By keeping a certain bunch of tall clovers on a line with a certain tree, we came to the place where the mother had so often disappeared. A long search revealed the nest carefully hidden in the grass and nearly arched over. Five half-fledged birdlings lay with their heads toward the outside, cuddled down compactly in a space apparently large enough for but one.

Like the martins, the nestlings were surprisingly large and were covered with brownish gray down. Their beaks were pinkish gray, and the inside of the mouths a deep rose red rather than yellow. Every little mouth was opened wide for food, but their eyes were covered with the usual membrane, and did not open until two days later. We judged them to be five days old.

As the days went by, the alarm call of the father increased in shrillness and was repeated more rapidly. At first sight of us in the distance, he was on guard, and not



## A PIONEER

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a movement escaped him. Never did he regard us with the least confidence, and our approach was the signal for a display of many amusing little wiles all intended to deceive us. Not once resorting to the stratagem of a broken wing, so common among wild birds, he attempted to convince us that the nest was in another part of the meadow. With elaborate absence of concealment, he carried butterflies fluttering like whirligigs and dragon-flies without number to a spot a hundred yards from the true nest. This was repeated day after day, and each time, finding it useless, he perched on the same fence post and called more piteously than ever. So long as we were visible, the young meadow larks cuddled together in unwinking silence, but if, hidden from them by the arched roof of their snug nursery, we were absolutely still for a time and then swished the grass lightly, every little mouth opened wide for food, with plaintive chirps. They remained in the nest until about twelve days old. One

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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morning, it was the 30th of May, after a soaking rain when we expected to find them half drowned, they were gone. We knew from the distress of the parents that they could not be far away, but listen as we would, not a sound came up from the clover. So discreet were they, and so protective was their coloring, that we were unable to find even one of them.

For many days they remained hidden in the clover field, and then we saw them flying to the fence and back, and finally they ventured as far as the wood. They were exact copies of the adult birds except in length of tail, which seemed out of proportion to their size, and they displayed the two white tail-feathers spreading in flight, like the parents. After a week's freedom they grew quite independent of parental support, and foraged for themselves far and wide.

Although we were not able to catch them, we did hear their first attempt at song, and, funny enough, it was much like a small

## A PIONEER

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boy's first attempt to whistle. Two notes, a little catch, two more, and sometimes only a quaver was the usual result. But they were very proud of it and kept at it early and late. I suppose it could hardly be called a song, and yet it was so evidently an attempt to give voice to their emotions of joy that it made sweet music in my ears.

The father did not sing much after the nestlings were hatched. He whistled occasionally very early in the morning or very late in the afternoon, but after the bobolinks came the music of the meadow larks was hushed. He still chose the same fence post, but his call was one of warning and anxiety rather than delight. Even after his family cares were over, and the babies all flown, he could not refrain from worrying. Evidently he was unable to realize that they were nestlings no longer.

The family seemed to keep together, for they were usually to be found in the same part of the field, and yet I seldom saw two of them side by side on a fence or a tree.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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One night, just after sunset, the dog flushed them from the meadow grass — which led me to infer that they slept close together not far from the old nest. Without a sound save a startled “whirr” they scattered in various directions, some reaching the low shrubs, and some alighting again in the grass. In this instance the parental instinct was shown by the adult birds taking conspicuous positions widely apart to distract attention from the young.

## A MAY MOVING

O bluebird, up in the maple-tree  
Shaking your throat with such bursts of glee ;  
Did you dip your wings in the azure dye  
When April began to paint the sky ?  
Or were you hatched from a blue-bell bright  
'Neath the warm gold breast of a sunbeam light ?

EMILY DICKINSON.

**W**ALKING one day through an orchard with an inquisitive friend, her eager, investigating fingers pried off a strip of bark and disclosed five exquisite blue eggs on a bed of feathers in the hollow limb of an apple-tree. The door of this dainty home was a foot higher up the branch, — a small round hole made by a downy woodpecker. The little bluebird mother, distressed at the undesired exposure of her domestic arrangements, after much talking it over with her spouse, decided to abandon the eggs and make a new home elsewhere. At first a clump of willows in a swampy place was

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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considered, and had this been chosen our history might never have been written. Both birds seemed to examine every available place there, and so pleased were they with one



Bluebird's nest in hollow tree

deserted woodpecker's home, I began to fear they had decided upon it. "She who hesitates is lost," and while Madam was still looking at empty houses this one was preempted by nuthatches. When next she approached it in blind confidence with mouth full of grass, a storm of nasal "Non, non," "Non, non," greeted her. Nuthatch French was convincing, and beyond a feeble protest she made no attempt to dispute their established claim. A site was finally chosen, after much anxious consultation and fre-

## A MAY MOVING

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quent internal inspection, to see whether it would fit and had a good subcellar and plenty of closet room, and with many prolonged pauses in the doorway to consider the view. It was in a tall stump in a grove of elms on the shores of a beautiful lake, and was more commodious than the first nesting-place, being the last year's excavation of a red-headed woodpecker. Also, the more pretentious doorway was several feet higher up and well out of the reach of prying fingers. Another thing commendable in the eyes of the home-seekers was the absence of any bark on the outside that inquisitive hands could break off. The other door faced east, while this faced west and allowed a fine view of the sunsets over the lake. Well satisfied with their choice, the patient, uncomplaining pair brought grass, feathers, and hair to furnish their new dwelling. In a few days — five, I think — the little blue mother retired to private life for a season, and the devoted mate, when not singing his sweetest from an adjacent

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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perch, brought her daintiest morsels of food and relieved her from duty at least once every day, going out of sight inside as she did. In two weeks from the time she began to sit there was great hurrying to and from the old stump. The babies had arrived and were hungry. Both parents were kept busy from that time on. We could hear the little soft twitterings inside the stump, gentle coaxing for food, musical protests against being crowded, and the welcome of the mother's return.

At last, after ten days' patient waiting, judging the nestlings to be full-feathered, the Man with the Camera cut open the side of the nest, and taking three of the babies out, gently placed them on a white cloth in the sun and photographed them. Meanwhile the fourth had asserted his right to freedom by flying away, and three babies at once being all we could well manage, we made no effort to capture him.

Those were troublous times at the old tree nest. The sunny-tempered parents



## A MAY MOVING

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were much disturbed at this violation of their privacy, and hovered about us with all the interest and anxiety manifested by human parents over "photographing the baby." Only on this occasion, there being four, and



Bluebird's nest in cavity of a fence-post

right lively ones at that, the process was even more tedious, and tried the patience of the photographer quite as much.

At last it was over, and two of the young were returned to the nest, and the damage was repaired by nailing the loose piece in again. The other two were held captive for

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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two days for further experiments in photography. Following the advice of Mr. Dugmore, we provided them with a nest as like their own as possible in a rubber sponge bag hung on a door-knob. Their food was yolk of hard-boiled eggs and cracker crumbs mashed together, varied by a cut-up earthworm every other meal. They were fed every hour, and had a drink of water with each meal, the last meal at night being at six o'clock, and the first in the morning at five. Even then, only ten days old, they showed different characteristics. One was gentle, easily pacified, and trustful; the other was fierce, always hungry, and resentful of captivity. From the brighter blue on the plumage we judged the gentler one to be the male. If so, how reconcile his meekness with his sex?

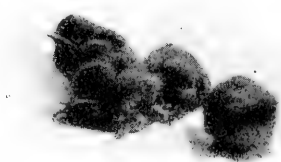
His wings were the color of the sky, the rest of his body being mottled gray, black, and white. A line of down over each eye marked his babyhood, as in all small birds; otherwise he was fully feathered. The fe-

## A MAY MOVING

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male, for so we will call the more soberly gowned fledgling, was soft dappled gray with scarcely a hint of blue in her coloring. Energy, courage, and a temper were surely hers, whatever her sex. She never liked to receive her food from our hands, would fight whenever a finger

was presented to her, and greeted us always with the peculiar hiss of birds born in hollow trees. She



Baby bluebirds twelve days old

looked on with indignation when we fed her small brother, and though apparently very hungry herself, never extended her bill for any morsel offered on the finger-tips or held over her between fingers. If given on the end of a wooden toothpick, it was eagerly swallowed. The blue wings of the male nestling quivered in eagerness, hers trembled with anger; and these two emotions were as distinct and easily recognized as in the behavior to a human baby.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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In photographing, also, we had much more trouble with her than with either of the others. She would not sit for a picture. She would turn her back to the camera, or would fly away just as it was ready for the snap. She awakened first in the morning, and called loudest for food. At last, being about to leave the vicinity, and not caring to take the nestlings with us, we tried the experiment of again opening the hole and replacing the two in the nest. Scarcely was the small piece that had been removed put back in place when the mother bird flew down and looked in at the door. "Dear, dear!" she seemed to say, "here are the lost babies, half starved! Hurry, hurry, to feed them!" and away she went after bugs and beetles. The father at once took her place, looked in also, uttered a bluebird exclamation of astonishment, and swiftly flew away for food in his turn. For half an hour one or the other parent was at the nest-hole constantly with nourishment for the returned nestlings. The lost were found,

## A MAY MOVING

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and the fatted calf was killed amid fervent rejoicings. It seemed to me that the blue-bird's song that night had a happier note—"Trually, trually," "thankfully, thankfully."

Two days after, the babies flew one at a time from the old tree nest. There was no



"Are you satisfied with this pose, Mr. Photographer?"

twig or bough near to receive them, for the tree trunk was stripped bare of bark and branches. Their flight must be from the door of their snug home out into the wide green world of forest. The nearest perch was twenty feet away. No wonder they stood a long time on the doorstep summon-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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ing courage to venture out. Twenty feet is a long distance for baby wings. There are wonderful and terrible things in the green forest to baby eyes. By and by one took heart of faith, or a gentle push from behind forced him out, and away he fluttered. "Bravo!" called the little blue father, flying around and under him. He almost reached the branch, tried for, but could not quite grasp it. Down, down he tumbled, half flying, half falling into the soft ferns, and sat breathless, frightened, but safe. His bravery was at once rewarded with a fine tid-bit brought by his fond mamma. In the mean time his brothers and sisters left in the nest had grown impatient, and now two little heads appeared one just behind the other in the small round doorway. There was a peck, some naughty words, and out popped two more almost at the same instant. Leaving home so abruptly, they had no opportunity to plan their travels, and tumbling, fluttering, down they came together near an old tomato-can. Breathless, but triumphant

## A MAY MOVING

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and delighted, they viewed it with curiosity. Cautiously the bolder pecked it. It gave out a tinkling, hollow sound. Lovely! He tried it over and over again, much as a small boy pounds a drum. His proud father came with worms, but for once he was too much occupied to eat. It was too exposed a place for a baby bluebird, and the wise little parents, knowing this, used every wile to coax him into a position of safety. Finally, fearing the cat would get him, I drew near to pick him up. Away like a flash he flew, the other little one following, and landed in a wild gooseberry bush ten feet away.

There yet remained one in the nest, the fifth having disappeared on the day of the first photographing. This was evidently a home body, for many visits and much coaxing from both father and mother failed to persuade her even to look out. At length, in curiosity and doubt as to what had become of her, I pounded on the tree very hard, and out to the edge she came. But an hour of coaxing was necessary to induce her

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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to try her wings. In the end the mother starved her to it by refusing to feed her in the nest. She would fly almost to the timid one's side with a tempting worm in her bill,



"We are so hungry"

and making a little coaxing noise, alight on the tree twenty feet away. At last hunger prevailed over fear, and the fledgling made a brave effort to reach her supper. Strange to say, she was the only one who succeeded in alighting on the tree. She was really bet-



## A MAY MOVING

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ter prepared for the journey than any of the others, but was of such a conservative nature, she preferred to endure present ills rather than fly to those she knew not of.

With many tempting bits of food, many soft words of praise, the three in the bushes were finally induced to strive to reach by easy stages a safe perch near the one. This done, both parents cuddled contentedly beside them, and peace reigned in the old tree.

## EL CAPITAN

'T is always morning somewhere,  
And above the awakening continents from shore to shore  
Somewhere the birds are singing evermore.

LONGFELLOW.

**E**ARLY in March, soon after the arrival of the three meadow larks, a flock of jolly rollicking red-winged blackbirds took possession of the woods along the marshy field. Careless of wind and weather, they piped their gay "Konkaree" on bright and gray days, insisting, in spite of the snow, that "Spring is here." Evidently the calendar, not the weather man, makes the blackbirds' Springtime. When the icy winds blew and the sleet covered all the trees, I wondered where they were, and whether cold and hunger would drive them southward again. But with the first sunshine out they came as merry as ever. I do not know how it may be ordinarily, but this flock evidently





## EL CAPITAN

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tucked themselves away in the lee of a straw-stack, for there they were on the very first hint of bright weather. There also were juncos and song sparrows—a companionship not usually sought by the red-wings.

Among this crowd was one who seemed to hold aloof or to be ostracized by the rest. Every evening, just at sunset, he took up his favorite position all alone on the tip-top bough of a tall oak-tree, and sang until the last purple ray had faded from the sky. Each morning from the same high perch he sent a greeting to the day. Knowing how gregarious blackbirds are, I wondered why he was so seldom with the rest. At length I was forced to believe that it was not from choice, for every time he approached them he was received with a chilly silence and great tail-wagging. And how much contempt a blackbird can express with his tail!

The reason was found in what seemed to me his especial distinction; for, by a strange freak, his shoulders were pure white instead

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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of crimson. At once I decided to keep track of him, if possible, and see him woo and win his mate.

This proved to be an easy task, for he was no rover. When the more accomplished musicians, such as the catbird, thrasher, and thrush, arrived from the south, the blackbirds retired to the marsh near the hotel, and with them went "El Capitan," as we had christened the white epaulets, and there we soon found him.

His wooing was conducted with the same gay nonchalance that characterized all his actions. With wings quivering and tail spread, he paraded before his little brown sweetheart. She sat swinging on the wild rice, apparently entertained but not enamoured. He hovered gracefully over her, sat on a rush in front of her, and sang "Konkaree" that sounded startlingly like "Marry me!" But she would not. Was it because the white shoulders were not to her taste? or did she fear the ridicule of the rest if she chose a mate with such *outré* coloring? While

## EL CAPITAN

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she was still hesitating, a rival suitor appeared. After a moment's pause to look over the "points" of the new-comer, "El Capitan" decided that "the game was not worth the candle," and, with a philosophy creditable to his sex, contemptuously flew away. He would not fight for any lady's favor; no, not he. With a flaunt of his tail he was off on another wooing just as ardent as before, and smiling to myself I say, "How like are birds and men!" Once having gained a mate, it was most interesting to watch his nest building. Strip after strip of wet marsh grass and moss was taken from the stagnant water and woven around strong rushes. There seemed to be less turning about and more fluttering than



Red-wing's nest in rushes

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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is usual in shaping it. Every piece was wet when placed in position. At last, before I was aware of it, the little home was completed, and one greenish-white egg scrawled with black lay therein.

But now a strange spell came o'er the spirit of his dream. For no reason that I could discover or imagine, he deliberately built a second nest on top of the first, covering up the egg and completing the second structure exactly as if there were no family skeleton in the dungeon beneath. Was it a whim of Madam's to have a house larger and more elaborate than her neighbors?

Fortunately for my observation he had chosen the edge of the marsh, either to have better air and sunlight, or for greater protection from the marsh rats. Being in a position exposed to the full force of wind and wave, even the first nest had been made deeper than usual and woven closely around strong dry cat-tail stalks.

Evidently the second-story apartment



## EL CAPITAN

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pleased the little house mother, for a new egg was added to its contents daily until there were five, and on May 15th sitting began. Food and water were near by, and yet the mother left the nest for long intervals while "El Capitan" stood guard. He made no pretence of taking her place, but watched with renewed vigilance and scolded a little harder as our boat came by, evidently regarding us with suspicion. Did he recognize us as those rude creatures who had set up a horrid black box on shining legs so near his home a day or so before, and thus kept his wife away from those precious eggs long enough to chill them? On May 27th the first two nestlings were out, and one hatched each day thereafter. We knew this before we looked, because of the curious antics of "El Capitan." For two days previous to this important event, I had seen him peeping into the nest with great concern; but, as he carried no food, I knew it was anticipation, not realization. When they did come, he nearly burst his throat in

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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angry chucks on our approach, his protests vigorously seconded by the mother.

But we were curious and therefore merciless; besides, was it not in the so-called inter-



Young red-wing blackbirds in nest

est of science? We pushed cautiously up and looked in,— only two babies yet. They were pretty little things, though so naked, for body, beak, and legs were just the color of a ripe apricot. In a few days dark lines of embryonic pinfeathers showed

down each side of the spine and the edge of the wing; then a soft brown down covered the throat, breast, and top of the head. By and by brown feathers pushed out through the quills, and evidences of a tail became more patent. The eyes opened and the skin grew darker, changing to greenish gray

## EL CAPITAN

---

on the forehead, which remained entirely bare even after they were fully fledged. When twelve days old they began to stand up, after the manner of young birds, and to tease for food on any approach to the nest, often with most coaxing chirps. The food carried to the nest was nearly all picked up from the water and the decaying vegetation among the rushes. The mother frequently walked out on the lily-pads, and filled her beak with the little black beetles always to be found there. As the babies grew older, dragon-flies and butterflies were fed them, the latter apparently having the wings torn off by the mother before being given to the young. I have no proof of this except what the field-glasses afforded, and I am not entirely sure of its accuracy. The birds were not especially shy, but they were difficult to watch on account of the constant motion of the rushes in front of the nest. These I did not wish to cut down for fear of exposing the little home to cruel eyes.

There is a spirit of reckless daring inher-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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ent in every young blackbird, and the offspring of "El Capitan" were no exception. One of these bald-headed babies balancing himself gingerly on the edge of the swaying nest, was a funny sight on a calm day, but funnier still when the wind blew. How tightly his tiny claws grasped the stout grasses as he bobbed this way and that, in a desperate struggle to keep right side up! How enviously the four in the nest watched his gyrations! Occasionally a second and a third would climb out beside him, and then something was sure to happen. Too often it was a tumble for all three back into the cradle, but never a cry or a quarrelsome note that I could discern.

All the little red-wings but two had flown before I reached the nest one morning — so early I fear no one will credit my note-book, which says 3:50 A. M., but morning comes quickly in the marshes where there are no trees to hide the sun. The nestlings were near by, hanging on to the rushes for dear life and begging for food with quivering

## EL CAPITAN

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wings. The two left in the nest were cuddled down, with no thought of flying, and I fancied they might not leave for another day. But "El Capitan" was a wise father, and by afternoon had taken his five little folks from the dangers of the water's edge to an orchard not far away. Here they lived day after day, a curious anomaly in blackbird life, picking up bugs from the ground and roosting at night in the trees. It is a statement which may occasion surprise that those small blackbirds tried to sing before July was over. To be sure, it was a weak quavering little song, but evidently a direct attempt to imitate the father's "Konkaree." "El Capitan" showed a ludicrous pride in this performance, and the very last glimpse I had of him he was sitting on a fence wire listening to the efforts of an ambitious youngster who was balancing upon a weed stalk below.

## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

On a bulrush stalk a blackbird swung  
All in the sun and the sunshine weather,  
Teetered and scolded there as he hung  
O'er the maze of the swamp-woof's tangled tether ;  
A black bass leaped for a dragon-fly  
And struck the spray from the sleeping water,  
While airily, eerily, there on high  
Sang the blackbird pert from his teeter-totter.

ANONYMOUS.

**A**MONG the glories of a certain Wisconsin marsh are hundreds of these beautiful birds. To me their music has a peculiar banjo-like quality unlike that of any other bird. Heard in the silence of acres of wild rice, there is something very weird and attractive in the sound. It is richer, fuller, and clearer than the song of the red-wings.

The yellow-head of the photograph was a magnificent fellow of glossy black plumage, except for the rich gold on his head, throat, and chest, and his lemon epaulets. Not all







## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

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the yellow-heads have the color in their wings, and this with his marked individuality singled him out from the crowd. He sat swaying and swinging on the rushes, not a



Home of yellow-headed blackbird

whit disconcerted by our approach, watching the boat glide nearer and nearer, watching also the camera as it was focussed and snapped, never ceasing his song or changing his attitude.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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We knew that somewhere within the forest of rushes was his nest, and all our interest centred in finding it. Pushing our boat as far in as possible, the oars were laid down on the mucky, quaking bog, and cautiously we crept to the snugly hidden home. It was a strongly woven, deep structure, very like that of the red-wing. The four pretty eggs were grayish white covered with pale brown speckles. The thinness of the middle of the shell warned us that they were ready to hatch. On our second visit, six days later, four nearly naked birdlings, covered with a mere haze of grayish down and embryonic pin-feathers, filled the nest. Although we waited patiently, not one ray of sunshine came the whole day long to make a photograph possible, and regretfully we postponed that pleasure another week. By this time it really seemed as if the male bird recognized us. He was much annoyed but fearless, and only protested mildly when we landed among the cat-tails and waded out to his nest. The water was so deep and the bog

## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

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so uncertain at that spot as to make picture-taking extremely difficult; and the Man with the Camera, being also a man with patience, made many attempts before he was finally successful. The little ones were very active handsome babies, fully feathered in soft shades of brown, and looked much like the young brown thrashers. The bills, however, were black, and the inside of the throat a soft rose pink, quite unlike the brilliant salmon of the red-winged blackbird nestlings; nor were their heads bare, as we expected. They were nearly ready to fly, and insisted on raising themselves up onto the edge of the nest and tumbling about in baby helplessness. In so doing one of them caught his claws in the skin of the head of his brother, and then ensued the first crying we had heard from these model children. The father meanwhile was circling over our heads, exhibiting curiosity rather than distress. He would alight every now and then near the mother, and sing a word or two of reassuring comfort to her. She was more

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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timid and much more distressed, fearing to come near us herself and perfectly certain that she would never see those nestlings again.

After taking their pictures, during which



Young clinging to edge of nest

they behaved admirably, we went into concealment to watch. At once the father was there with food, and the mother, being reassured that the boat so near did not mean a trap, soon joined him in caring for them.

To reach the haunts of the yellow-heads from our camp, required a row of three miles, a punt of one mile through marsh, a row of another three miles and punt of a quarter of a mile. Nevertheless, so determined were we to watch their nesting habits

## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

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and see these youngsters develop, that we went again and again, taking our lunch with us and lying in the marshes in a duck-boat all day. Many have described the beauties of marshland, but can any one register its heat? When the thermometer placidly climbs the nineties on the shady hotel veranda, out in the rushes a smothering, sickening mugginess steams up from the sluggish water and beats down from the blistering sky. However, it seems to affect the spirits of the blackbirds not one whit. Bitterns, rails, and tern hid under coverts, but the blackbird piped his "Konkaree" as cheerfully as ever. Satanic in his coloring, the red-wing is veritably an imp on a hot July day. He seems to mock at your discomfort and to exult in the swarms of midges and marshflies the heat coaxes up from the water.

Not so the yellow-head. At all times less active than the red-wing, he seeks a cattail on the edge of the channel where every puff of air will come his way, and sings in

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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rich content with the world, himself, and the weather. That the little ones in the nest are nearly ready to fly is his chiefest concern, for he is an ever-watchful parent. Four out of every five broods of red-heads that I have watched have been destroyed by snakes, owls, hawks, or marsh rats, but either because of greater vigilance in guarding, or because of some difference in location not apparent to a layman, the yellow-heads seem to be much more fortunate. All of the broods under our notice reached maturity and successfully took flight.

The one especially described in this chapter was very slow in developing. For several days after the birdlings seemed to be ready to leave the nest, they clung to it, loath to try their fortunes elsewhere. There was much stretching and climbing out onto the edge, but each time, just as I was waiting in breathless expectation of a startling *début*, the little brown wings would quiver rapidly, and with a look at me, much as to say, "You see I can fly if I really want to," down he

## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

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would cuddle into the nest again. During this waiting time the pride and interest of the handsome father were amusing. Except when necessary to obtain food, he never left his place on the tall rushes by the side of the nest. No movement of those youngsters escaped him. Often after an unusually vigorous wing-flapping by one of them, he would go a little nearer and utter two or three interrogative and rather musical chucks, as if to encourage the youngster to try again.

Although we had resolved to camp right by this nest, with a camera, and see every stage of flying, the first effort took place during a temporary absence, and the others so early in the morning that an "instantaneous," which was the only thing possible, was a failure. The young stayed about the vicinity of the nest for several days, but were seldom to be found on the tops of rushes. They seemed to slide down between them, and crouch on the floating vegetation. I now saw the reason for the glint of blue in their wings, for so perfectly does their color-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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ing harmonize with the brown of the water, and dead plant life, and the reflection of the sky, that it is very difficult to watch them. They were betrayed only by their efforts to learn the peculiar banjo-like song of their father. A faithful, untiring teacher he proved to be, patiently giving each note with great care and distinctness, as if he realized the responsibility of educating such wonderful musicians as those children were to be. When interrupted by the grunt of the bittern, or the squeal of the wigeon ducks, or the curious whinny of the "skiddies," he would flirt his tail in impatient derision, wait for a silence, and begin over again. Soon he was rewarded by what seemed to me curiously like a spasm of nausea accompanied by a queer clinking sound on the part of one of the little ones. This was repeated over and over, and always with the curious humping motion before the note was uttered, as if it must be forced up from the region of his tail. I have seen cow-buntings do much the same thing in their efforts to sing.



## A MINSTREL OF THE MARSHES

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The adult yellow-heads are graceful, easy vocalists so far as any physical effort is concerned, and I am curious to know whether all the young find song as difficult as did this brood.

The ordinary food of these interesting babies was waterbeetles, slugs, and dragonflies, but the many empty snail-shells, some bored in from the top, led us to suspect that these were dainties not to be despised in the blackbird menu. They are even accused of being cannibals and robbing the nests of their weaker neighbors of other species. Having no proof of this, and remembering the gentleness, beauty, and good-breeding of this particular family, I indignantly deny this slander upon them.

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

They 'll come again to the apple-tree —  
Robin and all the rest —  
When the orchard branches are fair to see,  
And the prettiest thing in the world will be  
The building of the nest.

MARGARET E. SANGSTER.

**T**HIS Spring, only a few feet from my window, a pair of robins built their nest of mud and grass on the horizontal limb of a large oak. There were no intervening branches, and except for a few leaves I had an uninterrupted view of robin house-keeping. From the first the male was a tyrant. Several times when the mother had carefully shaped the foundations of the nest to suit her taste, he would contemptuously poke it away, and remodel according to his own ideas. Toward the last, however, he seemed to realize the necessity of finishing, or he grew tired of teasing, for they worked together more amiably, and constructed a

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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model nest satisfactory to both. In it were laid four blue eggs, and the 2d of June sitting began. The little mother was extremely nervous, and watched my window with frightened eyes. Fearing she would desert, I kept the curtains drawn, and only indulged in cautious peeking. For fourteen days she brooded, relieved at long intervals by her mate.

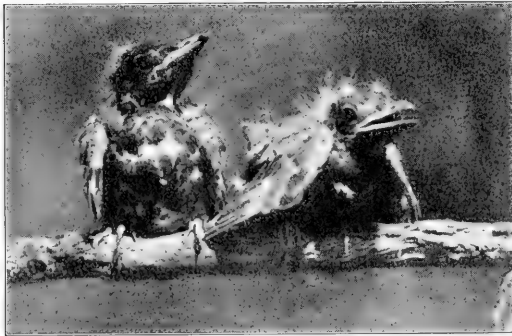
At these times, when he was left in charge, he made no pretence of covering the eggs, but stood astride them, a ludicrous picture of masculine helplessness in the care of babies. If she lingered away too long, he called her,— at first coaxingly, then imperatively, then angrily; and often have I seen him fly out and drive her back to her proper sphere in the home. At such times he lectured her severely on her neglect of duty, and flew away without his customary soft twittering. Whether because she feared me or because she liked liberty, she was loath to come back to the drudgery of nest-keeping, and he knew it. He was a strict

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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disciplinarian, and his rule of conduct evidently was, "I will be master of what is mine own."

On the fifteenth day there was a change.



Baby robins eighteen days old

Three small featherless birdlings were seen lying in a mixed-up mass in the little nest. Only by their great gaping yellow mouths could we tell how many there were, but those were ever open. The parents surveyed them with such ostentatious pride, I decided it was their first brood. For a long time both male and female brought food, and seemed to know instinctively which one had been fed last. They were model offspring

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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and rarely cried, but I could notice little contented wriggings and cuddlings when the soft low twittering of the parents on their way home was heard.

Some of the leaves hung over the nest on the side next the window, and prevented a full view, so a small boy climbed up and removed them. This caused great consternation in the robin family, and it was more than an hour before the mother came to the nest again. When she did, it was only to sit on an adjacent branch and "chuck" angrily at me, all the time holding a large yellow grub and a full-sized angle-worm in her beak. That she did not enjoy the wriggling of the latter was evident from the frequency with which she tried to get a better hold by rubbing him against the bark. Having tried in vain to bait a fish-hook myself, I fully sympathized with her.

The loud-voiced protests against my presence at the window called all the bird neighbors to the tree. First to respond was an oriole, who came quite near, cocked his head

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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on one side, and looked at the nest full of naked babies with amusing curiosity. Then, with a contemptuous flirt of his tail, as much as to say, "Humph, you need n't make such a fuss. Nobody could want such queer, homely things as those are! Now, if they were young orioles," etc., he flew away. This was too much for the robin, and furious with anger, she darted after him, pursuing him from tree to tree. Meanwhile a phœbe, a red-eyed vireo, a song sparrow, and a bluebird were examining the nursery from a safe distance and expressing their views. They were sympathetic and regarded me with suspicion; but an unmistakable spirit of criticism on the choice of location, size of nest, and method of building was evident in their remarks. The bluebird gently wondered why a nest should be built in such an exposed position when there were plenty of nice dark holes in the trees which were much safer and better for birdlings' eyes than such strong sunlight. The climax came when a red-winged blackbird

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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passing by was especially scornful, and his advice to "build near the ground among the cat-tails, where any inquisitive watcher would drown in the mud," was so unbearably conceited that both parents drove him away. Job's comforters were they all! All but one saucy English sparrow, who had been hopping excitedly between me and the nest, talking as fast as only a sparrow can. Finally, when the robin became sufficiently calm to listen, this was what that small brown bird said: "It's all nonsense, your being so frightened. My nest is much nearer to that monster than yours, and I am quite calm. Don't you know that's a woman, and she can't climb a tree? You are quite safe." This seemed in some strange manner to reassure the timid mother, and in a few moments she stayed at the nest long enough to pop a dragon-fly down the throat of the hungriest or the most persistent of her babies.

On the sixth day the eyes were opened and feathers beginning to show. Soon the breast

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH



Robin six weeks old

took on the beautiful mottled appearance of the thrushes. Far handsomer were they than either father or mother when they began to stand up in the nest and look out into the great world. They watched their parent fly away, at first with round-eyed astonishment, then with curiosity, plainly declaring, "I wonder how she does it." Finally, longing to follow was clearly expressed, and a resolve to

try shown by climbing out onto the edge. They were still under parental control, however, and, like naughty children, the moment



## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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mother was seen returning, down they would squat, as if the idea of flying had never occurred to them.

Twilight was a time of much restless poking and squirming on the part of these nestlings. Apparently they were as hard to put to sleep as human babies. As another writer says of young humming-birds, "They resented being sat on," and the mother was finally forced to be content with a seat on the edge of the nest.

When they were fourteen days old, there came a hard rain and wind which tore down trees and washed out culverts. Anxiously I watched the brave little mother battle with the storm. At first she sat facing the window, not daring to turn her back to me. Alas! in all those fourteen days she had not learned to trust me. The wind, catching her wings and tail, threatened to lift her bodily from the nest, and in a momentary lull she managed to turn herself so as to face it, not once rising to expose the little ones. There she clung for nearly two hours,

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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while the fierce storm beat pitilessly in her face, and it seemed as though cradle, babies, and all must go down. As it increased in fury, she spread her feathers, sitting even more closely, and forming a perfect shelter over the edge of the nest as well as over the young birds, and I believe not one drop reached them. After it was over and only a light rain falling, she flew off to an adjacent branch and shook herself as if from a bath, not one whit the worse for her drenching, and in ten minutes appeared at the nest with three angle-worms in her beak.

Having read Mr. Treadwell's estimate that each young robin eats sixty-eight earthworms daily, — which would be a proportion of seventy pounds of meat and six gallons of water per day for an average man, — I fell to counting the worms brought to this nest. The result seemed to justify Mr. Treadwell. In three hours after this rain, sixty-one earthworms, sixteen yellow grubs, and thirty-eight insects of various sorts, from grasshoppers to dragon-flies and moths,

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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had been devoured by those three innocent-looking young robins, and the feeding process was still going on when I left the window. During the last few days of their stay in the nest, either the father or the mother was cramming food down the spotted golden throats of the nestlings every three minutes.

There was strong individuality shown even then. One youngster, evidently a male, was much more restless, energetic, and self-assertive than the other two. I was not surprised to see him rise on the edge of the nest one day, watch his mother's flight, and decide that he could follow her. This he did, to the surprise and consternation of his small sisters left meekly at home. He went just as far as his untried wings could carry him, and landed in a crotch of the main trunk, six feet below the nest. Just then the father returned with food, and so astonished was he at the exploit of his son that he uttered a loud cry, even with his mouth full of caterpillars, and for one whole minute forgot to feed the venture-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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some youth. After that, however, he evidently decided that this was a son to be



Taking a sun-bath

proud of, — girls being a minor consideration anyway, — and he devoted all his efforts to the adventurer.

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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The next day the other two were still in the nest and seemed content to remain there, but the fond father and the eldest son were nowhere to be found. The Man with the Camera, having decided that conditions were favorable for a family portrait, climbed the tree amid the angry protests of a whole neighborhood of birds, and carried the two remaining babies down to be photographed. That ordeal over, he replaced them in the nest, expecting, of course, to see them fly away. But no, — they cuddled down, perfectly content to be safe, warm, and cared for. The glorious freedom of the air had no attractions for them; what they most desired was a cosy place to lie in the sun and watch the big white clouds float by, sure that at their first hungry chirp mother would bring them food. The anxious little mother seemed to feel something was wrong with these two, and talked to them more volubly after the largest one had flown. Once I fancied the father came back to look at them, but could not be sure, as he only

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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alighted near a moment and did not feed them.

It was five days after the flight of the first when these two were seen outside the nest, on a branch and nearer the window. Then the mother hovered frantically near them, afraid lest they fly too far and yet anxious to get them away from danger. She grew very cross and scolded constantly, savagely driving away every bird that came near the tree, apparently not knowing that by so doing she was telling the world what treasures were hidden there. I pitied her, left with the responsibility of those two lazy nestlings. There they sat, stupid, obstinate, refusing to budge. In vain she coaxed, in vain she offered tempting bits just out of reach. They nestled up to each other, shut their eyes, and slept. I believe I might have captured them with little trouble; and evidently the mother thought so too, for her distress was pitiful and compelled me to leave the window.

Where the father was during this troub-

## A MARTINET IN FEATHERS

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lous time at the home, I never knew. Once during that week I came upon a male robin feeding a solitary birdling at least a mile away from the tree I had been watching. It seemed improbable that they should have wandered so far away, and yet the coincidence of one baby with the father, is not frequent in the robin family, where all keep together so long. On the fifth day after the flight of the eldest son one of the two stay-at-homes actually ventured out of the nest as far as the nearest twig. This boldness so astonished the last nestling that, actuated by some occult impulse, he too resolved to try. As he balanced hesitatingly on the edge, the mother darted suddenly toward him, thereby precipitating a "fly or fall" crisis. Both nestlings flew — blindly — and landed in the shelter of a hawthorn-bush. There they sat all day, and about five p. m. fluttered to the lowest branch of a sapling for the night. The mother slept there with them that first night, and by morning they had all

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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gone farther afield, where I did not follow them.

But there was still an unhatched egg in the nest, and the small boy again climbed after it. To our surprise we found this egg contained a young bird nearly ready to hatch, and apparently it had been alive when the mother left the nest the day before. This irregularity is by no means rare among woodpeckers, but I had not found it before in the robin family.







## JIM'S BABIES

You slay them all ! And wherefore ? For the gain  
Of a scant handful more or less of wheat,  
Or rye, or barley, or some other grain,  
Scatched up at random by industrious feet,  
Searching for worm or weevil after rain !

LONGFELLOW.

**M**R. ERNEST SETON-THOMPSON says "every wild creature comes to a tragic end," and this seems to be particularly true of crows. They are the Ishmaels of the feathered kingdom, with every man's hand against them. The law which protects other birds offers a bounty for their heads. The farmers hate them ; the small boy considers them legitimate prey, and pockets the price on their heads with the satisfaction of well-doing. I confess to a grudge against them myself for the many nests of song-birds they have robbed within my own precincts. It is disappointing to watch a brood day by day until the young

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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are hatched, and you have conceived a real love for the helpless little things, and then come back after an hour's absence to find that a crow has stopped there for breakfast, and not one is left. And yet, why blame the crows for what we, with our full knowledge of good and evil, do for mere personal adornment or gratification of palate?

The story I am going to tell of a farmer's hate and a father bird's love is true in every respect, and is, alas! only one of many such instances.

Early in April a pair of crows selected the top of a sturdy oak in the wood about our temporary home for their nest, and began to build. Day after day they carried twigs from the brush pile, dead leaves from the wood, and bunches of cow-hair from the pasture, to the crotch, and placed each bit with nicest care. Let no one slur a crow's nest, for every twig has its own place, and you cannot remove one without disturbing the entire structure. This particular nest, according to the description of the Man

## JIM'S BABIES

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with the Camera, who had climbed to inspect it, was the perfection of good workmanship, and was lined with a thick mat of cow-hair padded down to a hemisphere. We had supposed it to be much flatter and less deep than the examination revealed. In it were laid five pointed olive-green eggs, spotted with black. They were arranged in a circle with points toward the centre.



Olive-green eggs spotted with black

The mother bird was extremely shy, and left the nest before the intruding climber had reached the first crotch, and all efforts to obtain a good photograph of her failed. She was never away long, and on returning in-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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variably followed the same route with the same precautions. Circling over and past the tree-top several times, she would alight on a tree fifteen feet to the west, and look in every direction ; then flying to one about the same distance to the east, she looked again. In order to remain hidden I was obliged to swing myself around the trunk of a tree as she moved in search of me. Having assured herself that all was well, she flew to the topmost limb of the nest-tree, and hopped down the branches to the one containing the nest ; then, walking with a comical deliberation along it, she slipped onto the eggs so deftly that, watch as I might, I never saw her do it. Once there, she seemed to sit motionless until the next resting-time, and only her yellow-rimmed eye could be seen winking as she peered over the edge at us. Her mate came often, bringing her frogs, fish, and even duck eggs. The first she swallowed whole, the fish she seemed to tear, and the egg was placed in the nest, where she ate it from

## JIM'S BABIES

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the shell as daintily as Queen Victoria is said to have done. The male always carried these in his beak, and I am sure the fish were, as a rule, several days dead. I watched him many hours at his fishing, and never but once saw him catch a live fish. Usually he preferred those cast up on the shore by the water. Frogs and snakes he caught in the marshy meadow, and I have seen him kill a snake that measured twenty-three inches long. But for our shouting, which compelled him to leave it, he would probably have carried this to his mate on the nest. A fish, which we forced him to drop from mid-air, fell into an open meadow, and, concealing ourselves at a distance, we watched him come back for it. This he did almost immediately, but being frightened a second time, gave up the search, and with many indignant "caws" flew back to the lake for another.

Early in our acquaintance with "Jim" a peculiar conflict took place, at sunrise one

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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morning, which resulted in a loss of his chief beauty — his tail. He was usually to be seen on a tall tree one hundred feet from the nest, where he could watch all that occurred and be near if danger threatened. It happened that blue jays had selected this tree for their home, and they wisely objected to sharing it with him. They had fought him day after day, and driven him away temporarily, only to find him there on their return from each absence. At length matters reached a crisis, and a mob of jays attacked him, resolved to settle the question of possession once for all. For a time he held his ground gallantly. The method of warfare then became most amusing. A jay, perched above the crow, flew down, knocking his tail each time in insult, and at the same moment one below flew up, bumping against him as he rose, and screaming in derision. One jay would “dare” another openly to further insult, and at length the challenged alighted squarely on the crow’s back for an instant. Escaping punishment, they became reckless,



## JIM'S BABIES

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and while the poor crow, bewildered by the onslaught of the jays in front, flapped his wings and screamed, turning round and round to face them, these two jays flew between his wings and his body several times, nearly upsetting him. At length, either rendered desperate by his obstinacy or grown bolder with his seeming lack of courage, they seized his tail and hung on until each had pulled out a feather. This was too much for even a crow's courage, and he left, ignominiously defeated by a "passel of good-for-nothing jays."

Much as I sympathized with him, I could not but be glad of the accident which enabled me to distinguish him with certainty from other crows, and from that day my interest in him doubled. About this time the low chuckings were heard more frequently in the old crow's nest. "Jim" redoubled his attentions to his mate, and seldom left her without a note or two of farewell in a tone wholly different from harsh crow "caws." He stood guard on a nearer tree now, and

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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when she left the nest she invariably called him to it with a peculiar inflection on the "c-a-a-w." To me it said, "Come, come, dear;" and he came instantly. Whatever may be crow etiquette on such occasions, "Jim" was a model spouse, patient, faithful, and brave.

Early one April morning, about two weeks after the first nest building, we noticed an unusual stir in the tree. Both parents were there on a limb near the nest; and, from the excited tones and comical oglings, we concluded that the babies had arrived at last. So the Man with the Camera once more ascended to investigate. Great was the commotion his presence created. Calmly to focus a camera while two angry crows are aiming at your eyes with beak and claws requires more than Roman fortitude, and he was forced to content himself with a hurried glance into the nest and a still more hurried descent. There were five of the homeliest bits of bird-life imaginable, naked, blind, with a dull greenish hue to their skin,

## JIM'S BABIES

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and yet the objects of absurd pride to Mr. and Mrs. "Jim." Never were babies more admired or more coddled. One of the parents was at the nest constantly with dainties for the darlings. I am sorry to say these too often consisted of the young nestlings of other birds. We knew this by the way "Jim" robbed nests. English sparrows, song sparrows, and field larks were his victims. Eggs of all varieties, young frogs, minnows, refuse from the kitchen, were all carried to those nestlings.

It takes a surprisingly long time for young crows to develop, and "Jim's" babies were no exceptions to this rule. For fully four weeks they were kept in the nursery and were model infants.

The last ten days I could see them stand on the edge of the nest, and, stretching each little wing with their claws, look about over the swaying tree-tops and straight at the sun with blue eyes that never blinked. About this time, with the help of a small boy, a photo was taken of the five in their nest; but

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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the negative, like dozens of others, for some mysterious reason was a blank. Before we could get another they had flown. In spite of our close watching, and possibly because of it, this important first lesson in flying took place during our absence from the wood; but we saw them soon after snuggled up together, every mouth open for food. This Mr. and Mrs. "Jim" took turns in supplying until the young were several days out of the nest, and then their training began. So far as I am able to judge of bird education, they were much more easily taught than young robins.

While we did not see the very first flight, we did witness the preliminaries for several days beforehand. These lessons lacked the fuss and coaxing of the robins. The young crows hopped out on the nest limb and flapped their wings in exercise many times before the final day came. At such times "Jim," on the topmost twig of the tree, watched them with pardonable pride. He also watched us, and talked in a crow under-

## JIM'S BABIES

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tone to those five black babies about the enemies lurking under the tree. Mrs. "Jim" was even more nervous, and kept up a perpetual cawing and jerking her tail whenever we were in sight. It was comical to see the young ones peer over the edge at us in imitation of their elders, withdrawing instantly at our first move.

Every night found them in the oak-tree. When taken down to the lake's edge as soon as they could fly to drink and bathe, they walked into the water with evident delight, and waded about in it, trying to pick up bright pebbles shining on the beach. The second day they did find some kind of food, though it was impossible through the field-glasses to tell just what. At some signal given by "Jim" they usually rose with one accord in circles until level with the tree-tops, sometimes striking a lower level and disappearing in, rather than over, the wood. Yet wherever they spent their waking hours, I am sure that for many days they came back to the nest-tree at night.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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By this time their wings were strong, and one day the entire family, with several others, disappeared over the tree-tops and did not, according to tradition, come back to the old tree to roost. We missed them, and wondered why, but not until a week later was this mystery solved. When driving through a country road on the other side of the lake, the Man with the Camera exclaimed, "That looks like a crow hanging on the barbed wire fence yonder!" We tied the horse and tramped across lots to investigate, and may such a sight never meet my eyes again. On the ground within a radius of a few feet were the lifeless bodies of five young crows; and there, beside his slaughtered little ones, hung "Jim," impaled by his throat and exhibited as a warning to all his tribe not to meddle with that farmer's corn. Looking over the many acres of bright green spears that stretched field after field away to the woods, I wondered whether the amount taken by "Jim" and his brood would have materially lessened that crop.

## JIM'S BABIES

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Poor "Jim!" His efforts to get an honest living for his young were thwarted by the crowds of fishermen near his home, and so, in thievery of a few kernels of corn, he met his fate. What diabolical trap had been set for them, and where was Mrs. "Jim"? These questions were never answered. It was enough to know that "Jim," though doubtless a thief and cannibal, had perished in defence of his young like the courageous father he had ever been, and we sadly added one more to our list of bird tragedies.

## PHŒBES AND THEIR COUSINS

The little bird sits at his door in the sun,  
Atilt like a blossom among the leaves,  
And lets his illumined being o'errun  
With the deluge of summer it receives;  
His mate feels the eggs beneath her wings,  
And the heart in her dumb breast flutters and sings ;  
He sings to the wide world, but she to her nest, —  
In the nice ear of nature which song is the best ?

LOWELL.

**A**N ice-house is a curious place for a home even in summer weather, but this particular ice-house stood on the side of a bluff overhanging a pretty inland lake, and a site on the big hoisting-beam just under the eaves offered advantages of safety, coolness, and fine view not often found. Moreover, there were tall trees all about it, to give it a more rural air and insure plenty of bird neighbors. Here early one April morning a handsome little Phœbe brought his mate, and persuaded her in sweetest tones to go to housekeeping. She was



## PHŒBES AND THEIR COUSINS

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some time in deciding. It seemed to be a little higher from the ground than she really



Phæbe's nest and young

liked, for she kept flying down from it to the ledge of the door just beneath. But he insisted on his choice and she had promised to obey, so they began to build. So fearless and so friendly were they that conceal-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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ment was unnecessary, and I watched them openly. At first they came with mud, then bits of fibre and fine moss, then more fibre. For six days they were busy weaving and shaping it to their taste. As she sat in it to mould it, her little tail was often flat up against the boards, a most uncomfortable position, but the home-making so absorbed her that she did not mind. When the house was finished, an artist might have marvelled at its beauty, — of soft green and silver, so round and smooth that it looked to be shaven, and yet every little spear of moss was perfect in shape. It has been suggested that Phœbes, humming-birds, and others who pad their nests thickly with moss and down, do so to render them non-conductors of electricity during a storm; but this seems to me very improbable. Yet what better explanation have I? We all ask “why?” but he who is to explain Nature’s mysteries is yet to come. It was enough for me to know that when the five tiny white eggs were laid in that pretty nest, the mother

## PHŒBES AND THEIR COUSINS

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brooded while the father watched and sang.

He took up his position on the end of the ridge-pole of the roof directly over the nest, and while incubation was going on was rarely absent and rarely silent. At all hours of the day and far into the night I heard him, and my glass seldom failed to show him standing like a sentinel in the same place. He seemed never to sleep, and I know he spent every clear night on the ridge-pole.



Baby pewee fast asleep

When the little ones were hatched, most of the feeding seemed to be done by the mother. True, the father would catch his meal in a short flight out from his perch and back again in true flycatcher fashion, and

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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dodge down with it to the babies; but usually it was the mother who fluttered back and forth with tiny bugs for the brood. There were five pretty nestlings in that one small house, scarcely big enough for two. As they grew larger, the wee mother seemed to sit up on a platform of tiny heads. After a time she was crowded out onto the very rim.

One bright morning I missed the little father from his post, and went to see what had become of him. He sat on the extreme end of the hoisting-beam, with two babies beside him; and there the three remained all day until darkness covered them. The three babies yet in the nest were the objects of much solicitude to the anxious mother. She hardly dared leave them, either from fear that they would fly or anxiety lest they would not. At the foot of the bluff were countless myriads of insects, and there the swallows flew in circles, sometimes almost striking the ground in their swift downward curves. The mother did not join them

## PHŒBES AND THEIR COUSINS

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that day, but by short fluttering flights evidently managed to fill her beak and keep the nestlings fed. Whenever she left them the father called "Phœbe, Phœbe," with greater energy than ever. At length, without any warning apparent to my dull ears, one of the young birds decided to fly. He stood up, quivered his wings a brief moment, and plunged headlong out with blind fluttering. In some way the father was under him as soon as he started, and together they landed in the projecting branches of a tree half-way down the bluff. As soon as this youngster was safely settled, back flew the little father to the one left on the beam, fed him, and coaxed him to fly. He had already sat there twenty-four hours, and needed little coaxing to leave. The family was divided, the first two going with the father and the three in the nest being cared for entirely by the mother. In two days more they had flown also, and the pretty home was deserted.

The wood pewee seems to me like the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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descendant of a "younger son" of the Phœbe family. Their song bears a strong family resemblance, but is voiced in a plaintive minor key expressing some weight of woe which lies heavy on that tiny heart. He is not always sad, however, for when the wee olive sweetheart has consented to be his, the music fairly bubbles from his throat in ecstasy.

The only brood I ever watched had diminished to one before I found it, and that one was nearly ready to fly. We could see his pretty head over the edge of the dainty nest on the lowest branch of an oak-tree. The father was very proud of him, and exceedingly anxious when we borrowed him to photograph. Of course to him he was the brightest and handsomest of babies, but to me he seemed unusually stupid. In spite of all we could do, he insisted on going fast to sleep on the perch, looking as ragged and distressed as possible. The sun shone very bright and warm upon him, and possibly this was a pewee's method of taking a sun-

## PHŒBES AND THEIR COUSINS

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bath ; but instead of leaning sidewise, as most birds do, he nodded forward and seemed about to fall over.

He could call his name almost as well as his father when he chose, and he usually did



Dainty nest of the wood pewee

choose. The interpretation evidently was "Feed me! Feed me!" and brought about the desired result. The mother had probably met with a tragic end, for we never saw her at the nest, and the father took entire care of the little orphan. When we put him back after photographing him, he snuggled down as if relieved to be again at home, and made no attempt to leave it for four more days. On the fifth day he was gone, but

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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hidden in the neighborhood, for a mournful "Feed me! Feed me!" came from the tree as we drove under it in leaving.

The nest, which was taken later, was badly smashed at the side, as if some larger bird, possibly a jay, had meddled with it, and the lining was entirely out of it, exposing the bare branches to view in the bottom. I wondered by what heroism that tiny father had defended and saved one nestling from the fate that had overtaken the mother and the others.



## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

Then from the honeysuckle gray  
The oriole with experienced quest  
Twitches the fibrous bark away,  
The cordage of his hammock nest,  
Cheering his labor with a note  
Rich as the orange of his throat.

LOWELL.

**F**ROM the outermost tip of an oak-tree branch on the sunny side of a hill, swung the pretty silken cradle of these orioles. The unusually brilliant plumage of the father bird and his glorious song were the subject of much admiring comment long before he chose this nesting-site, and when he brought his little mate to that tree and inspected its facilities by hanging chickadee fashion from the tip of that very branch, I held my breath in ecstasy of hope. Now orioles do not like to build in an oak, for two reasons: it is the foraging ground of squirrels who gather the acorns; and the branches, being less pliant, afford a better

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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foothold for despoilers of the pretty nest. Swung from the slender swaying twigs of an elm, it would be practically inaccessible to all foes. But elms are few in that locality, and the orioles decided that if the nest were made extra deep and very small at the top, it would be comparatively safe even in an oak. Next in order was to win his sweetheart to his way of thinking. It was his first courting, I am sure, for never did such ardor pour from a bird's throat.

The course of true love never does run smooth, however, and his wooing was no exception. In spite of fine feathers and fine song, the lady of his choice was hard to please, and for more than two weeks he was untiring in his attentions before she finally consented to commence housekeeping. After many visits and much talking it over, he appeared one day with a long strip of honeysuckle bark, and in some way coaxed it to stay wound around the twig, one end hanging down straight. After that he came constantly with silvery bits of plant fibre,

## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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which his mate wove busily back and forth, until by magic the exquisite nest took shape. We saw him pull and tug at the dead weed-stalks, coming back to the same plant again



The beautiful and the grotesque

and again for more. Clover stems contribute their share of silk also. Although there were many feathers on the ground, he never touched them, and string was also scornfully rejected. One whole afternoon he spent gathering dandelion silk by jumping on the tall stems and walking along until his weight brought the heads to the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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ground, where he seemed to thrash the seeds out and carry away the silk in triumph. Funniest of all was it to watch him tug at a long horse hair that had become fastened in the bark of a tree. Bracing himself on the side of the trunk, woodpecker fashion, scolding all the time, and finally swinging off and around in the arc of a circle in his efforts to loosen it, he would not give it up. Several times he withdrew, tired out, only to renew the attack as soon as he had "caught his breath again." No other hair would do, and there was general rejoicing when he at last flew away with it. This and countless other hairs, he used to stiffen the nest and hold it in shape.

During this time the female carried comparatively little material, but did all the weaving. The male seemed to help to pad it inside with the lining material, disappearing entirely within the nest, but Madam attended to all the outside ornamentation. Not a piece of string of any kind, not a bit of rag or paper was used in it. Only plant fibre

## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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of the clearest silkiest texture, dandelion down, and red clover silk. This was the more remarkable because only a short distance away we found a nest made mostly of fishline woven in with a cotton necktie, and lined with colored calico ravelings. Also white hairs were used for the first, and any sort in the second. One nest was beautiful, the other ugly but curious. What instinct in the brains of those two little builders led them to choose so differently? Why was one home artistic and the other a hotch-potch? Was the one an attempt to imitate a hornet's nest for better protection, or was the builder really impelled by a sense of beauty? Did the second builder think to make his home look like a bunch of rags accidentally caught in a tree, or was it on account of greater ease in obtaining the necktie and fishline, or were they more beautiful to his eyes on account of the color? Who can tell what the thought of a bird may be? For some reason, perhaps because of its shallowness and wide top, the brood in the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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necktie nest were stolen by a blue jay one by one, while the other little ones were successfully reared to adult oriole-hood,—not, however, without great vigilance on the part of the father. I had supposed him to be remarkably amiable, but now he was a veritable Thibetan guarding his sacred city. Harsh scolding notes mingled with his sweet music all day long, and any intrusion by man or bird was greeted with a volley of chucks so sharp and so rapidly exploded as to remind one of fire-crackers under a tin pan.

When we judged there might be eggs, the Man with the Camera climbed the oak-tree, and by a skilful use of twine bent the branch so that he could look into it. Five white eggs marked with black lay there. Ten days later he looked again, and four little mouths were stretched up for food. A week later they appeared over the top of the nest, reaching up one at a time, and then quickly disappearing as the mother was heard scolding on her way home.

## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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About this time she seemed uneasy as night came on. The nest was evidently crowded and the babies very restless, for, after many trials to settle herself inside the little home, she came outside and rested on



Fluffy baby orioles

the end of the branch, her head over the nest. Occasionally a little head would reach up, only to receive a sharp reproofing peck from her. She kept up an intermittent, half-fretful, half-soothing gurgling note, unless the father was singing near, when she appeared to be quite content. This continued for several days until, one fine morning, a youngster actually succeeded in balancing himself outside the nest.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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A young bird learning to perch is an odd sight. At first he seems to pitch forward most alarmingly, then, when he has righted himself, a gust of wind or an incautious movement carries the centre of gravity too far back, and he hangs over like a trick-performer on a horizontal bar. Sometimes he over-reaches and tumbles ignominiously to the friendly arms of the next branch, or even to the ground. No such fate befell the young oriole. His feathers were all in trim, and but for down on the sides of his head and the shortness of his tail he was the image of his mother. No sooner had he taken his position outside the parental roof than the world looked so big that he was frightened and began to call for help. Instantly both parents were beside him, feeding and comforting him. This he enjoyed so much that the moment they left he cried again, and so piteously that they were forced to return. After that, like a naughty child who has discovered that crying brings the desired result, that young oriole raised his



## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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voice and wings in constant demand for food, until I felt sure that the tired father must long for night to come.

The three other nestlings were slower in leaving home, but after a wait of two days they flew one each day until all were out. As fast as they left the nest the father took them in charge, and left the cares of home to the mother. I often pitied him as he flew from branch to branch closely pursued by those three hungry nestlings, all begging for food at once. Not for one moment were they silent or satisfied. With wings quivering and mouths wide open, they were ever close behind him, and I marvelled many times at his untiring patience. His stronger wings would easily have carried him out of their reach, but he was their willing slave. When the fourth baby was out, his life became somewhat easier, for the mother bird shared his cares. It was at this time one afternoon, just as the sun was getting too low for best work with the camera, that we were able to catch this family one by one

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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and get a photograph of them. They were easily posed, and the affair was attended with less interference on the part of the parents than one would suppose.

This particular male oriole had a greater variety of song than any I have watched.



Contentment

The "Love Song" early in the morning, when his mate brooded the little eggs, seemed to say, "Here am I, here am I, dear, dear." A little later this was interspersed with a peculiar whistle of three notes and a fall. After the brood were hatched, it changed to a rising inflection and three notes. But many were the variations during the long June day. Often have I hurried out of doors at the call of a new bird note, only to find that the singer was my oriole. How could I recognize him? By the redness of the orange at his throat and his trim slender body. This was, I think, his first experience in family cares.

## THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL

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The inmates of the other oriole home were less fortunate than these, for when the babies were first hatched a cat caught the mother while she was getting food on the ground. The father had not seen the tragedy, and for thirty-six hours he called her continually in a plaintive descending whistle. Not once did he sing or utter a joyous note, but called far into the night, as if wondering why she did not come. He tried to take her place with the little ones. I saw him carry food at intervals of three minutes during most of the day, and I am positive he slept that night in the nest, a thing male orioles are not supposed to do. But because only one parent was there to watch, a cannibal blue jay found those babies in the father's absence and carried them off, one each morning, to a tree quite near and ate them. It has been hard not to hate the jays since then, and I am ready to accuse them of many of the robberies committed in the bird-world. Strange as it may seem, the oriole did not mourn the loss of his nest-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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lings as he had mourned that of his mate. Perhaps he felt unequal to the task of bringing up a family alone, and was relieved when, through no fault of his, the burden was lifted.





## A FOSTER BABY

Joyous as morning  
Thou art laughing and scorning.

WORDSWORTH.

**A** MOST bewitching bird is the fluffy little chickadee of kindergarten fame, so jolly, so debonair, so confiding withal. Watch him, hanging head downward from the tip of a twig so slender that it bends with his weight. With a comical air of business he hunts under each leaf, yet is instantly alert to your approach. Now he has spied you, and greets you with a title to which you may never have aspired. "A dee dee! a dee dee!" he cries in mockery, until you laugh too, it is all so absurd. If you are patient he will come nearer and enter into quite a chat with you, provided you can reply in his own language.

It had long been the desire of my heart to find a chickadee's nest; so when, on the tenth

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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day of May, a small gray bird with a mouthful of worms disappeared in a thorn-bush, I at once investigated. Did not all the books tell me that chickadees nested in hollow trees or old stumps, in old woodpeckers' holes, or holes excavated by themselves in birch-trees? Why look for a nest in a thorn-bush? But there at the foot of the bush, well hidden by the thick branches, was the rotten stump of a small tree, and in one side, only twelve inches from the ground, a small hole. Could this be my treasure found at last? Cautiously I probed it with a grass stem. The intrusion was greeted with such a storm of hisses as left no room for doubt. Retreating at once to a discreet distance, I sat down to watch. Now, what may constitute a discreet distance differs with the innate valor of the individual chickadee. This particular pair were exceedingly timid, and would not go to the nest until I had gone thirty feet away. Then the mother bird, with much hesitation, flew to the thorn-bush, looked about, talked a



## A FOSTER BABY

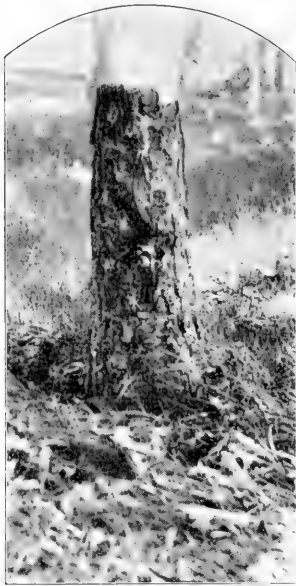
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bit, hopped down near the nest hole, and finally, after several trials, ventured in. Thus encouraged, the father, who had watched anxiously, came with food immediately on her departure. As they became accustomed to my presence, they gathered worms and flies from the tree above my head, carrying them quite fearlessly to the nestlings, but always pausing to look back at me from the doorway on entering or leaving. Taking a strawberry from my lunch-box and stringing it on a stem of timothy, I hung it on the bush near the doorway. They were curious, and flew about, over and under it; but either they suspected a trap, or strawberries are not to a chickadee's taste, for it remained untouched.

It being too late to see more that night, I went home resolved to renew the acquaintance the next day. Five A. M. found me an early caller at the chickadee's door, but the dwelling was empty. Evidently the nestlings were older than the calendar would have indicated as proper in a well-regulated

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

chickadee family, for all had flown. The nest, lined with a soft felting of rabbit hair,



Location of chickadee's nest

was yet warm, and having watched other mother birds carry the excrement away from the nest, I was not surprised to find it as clean as though four babies had not just left it.

Disappointed and discouraged, I turned away. A walk through fragrant catbirds' nooks and close by a brown thrasher brooding

her young, brought me to a grove of tall oaks and hickories. Deep ravines purple with wild geranium, white with long-fruited anemones, and beautiful with ferns, ran zigzag through it. Just the place for whip-poor-will's eggs, I thought. At this

## A FOSTER BABY

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moment, from a hole in the side of a low stump just in front of me, out popped a chickadee! Another nest! This bird was not at all afraid, and sat on top of the stump only two feet from the ground, evidently annoyed yet not disposed to resent the intrusion. He seemed to divine that my interest was friendly, for after a moment he was off, hunting flies and small green worms on a neighboring tree. Lying down close by, I watched his diplomatic manoeuvres through half-closed eyes. He came very near on a branch which hung low over me, chattering and scolding saucily in great curiosity. Evidently he was suspicious, and wished to prove the reality of my feigned sleep. Picking up worm after worm, he ate them in full view, as if to convince me that the chief end of his existence was to satisfy his own hunger. But I knew better. That small round hole in the stump guarded treasures infinite, and sooner or later father love would prevail against discretion. Meanwhile the mother bird, for so I judged her

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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from her ruffled feathers, had been dodging silently in and out, carrying little white butterflies, spiders' eggs, and fat worms to those chickadee babies. Very soon the father, tired of enforced idleness, joined her, and for hours both parents flew into the nest with food every five minutes.

I went home for luncheon that day, and on the way back to the chickadee friends with my camera in the afternoon, I found the hero of this story, one of the young chickadees of the brood first discovered. He was an innocent-looking, soft, appealingly helpless baby, as he sat motionless in a shrub near his old nursery home. As I put my hand down over him, he looked up in an astonished way, but made no effort to avoid me. I carried him over to the second chickadee nest, nearly half a mile away, and put him in the grass at the foot of the stump. At once the owners of the home were much excited. "Why, how did you get out? You are not big enough to fly! We must feed you at once," they

## A FOSTER BABY

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seemed to say; and the little fellow chirped "Feed me! Feed me!" They did not seem to know he was not their son, and, deserting the little ones in their own nest, both foster parents carried food to him until he shut his eyes in very surfeit and went to sleep. This continued at intervals all day. Several times, fearing the babies in the nest would suffer, I caught him and held him captive in a box, an hour at a time. Once he had flown up above my head in a tree, but with coaxing he perched upon a bare branch which I held, and allowed me to bring him down. He did not usually object to being caught, although strong in flight and apparently able to care for himself. I put him in the nest of his foster parents, but he immediately hopped out and stood on the edge. Here they were most assiduous in bringing him food, and were evidently very proud of the fine strong little fellow.

Meanwhile, as he flew bewildered from bush to tree, he landed on the side of a

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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trunk and clung helplessly, crying in a piteous, frightened way. Instantly the foster mother was at his side with a bit of food and a soft note of comfort. "Never mind, dear, I'm here." Nor would she leave him until after many trials he reached a safer perch.

This pair were utterly unlike the real parents in being bold and dashing, careless of danger, heedless of our presence, and the pictures were secured with the photographer only a short distance from the birds.

It was a great temptation to cut open the newly found nest and photograph the entire family. The Man with the Camera has since regretted that any scruples prevented. However, a knowledge that we could not equal Mr. Chapman's inimitable group of nine young chickadees at the nest hole, together with a resolve to molest nothing unless absolutely necessary, restrained us. It is sometimes most inconvenient, this having a conscience. We never again have had such an opportunity to picture chickadee babies.

## A FOSTER BABY

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On our way home that night, I put the young chickadee in my lunch-box, cutting slits in the cover, and carried him back to his own parents in the other grove, where, having placed the box on its side in a tree, I hid to watch. He called; they answered and were there at once, trying to help him to get out. They pulled, and he pushed to loosen the bars. Failing in that, they fed him, though not so eagerly nor so fearlessly as his foster parents had done. One stood on guard, while the other carried food to the little prisoner. All at once, without apparent cause or warning, they both flew away and ceased to call or notice him. In amazement I took the little fellow out of the box and placed him near them, but they merely flew farther away and seemed to watch curiously, with no idea of protecting or caring for him. I saw his little head droop and thought him sleepy. A moment later his wings quivered and he fell from the twig dead. Horrified, blaming myself for unconscious cruelty, I picked him up

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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and tried to revive him, but without success. A half-swallowed cedar worm seemed to tell the story. Unwilling to leave him captive in the box and unable to free him, his brave little father had brought him poisoned food. Where had he learned such wisdom, if wisdom it be? And how did he realize that the little one was beyond his help? And having given him the fatal dose, why leave him? This is not imagination, but fact, attested by several witnesses. Yet who can riddle me the how and the why? Never since then have I had the courage for further experiments along that line.



## MARSH CRADLES

Dear marshes! Vain to him the gift of sight  
Who cannot in their various incomes share,  
From every season drawn, of shade and light,  
Who sees in them but levels brown and bare.  
Each change of storm or sunshine scatters free  
On them its largess of variety,  
For Nature with cheap means still works her wonders  
rare. LOWELL.

**A** TRAMP through the marshes at four A. M., waist-deep in the lush wild grass, the mists veiling the wonderful unseen beyond, and, in the near distance, the pink of the mallows, the purple of the iris, and the yellow of the marigold still heavy with the dew, reflecting the glories of the sunrise sky; to hear the bird chorus as you never hear it at any other hour of the day; to see the birds waken, stretch their little wings, and enjoy a morning bath, splashing and dashing as if they could never have enough of the cool fresh water; to watch them shake and preen their little wet feathers as

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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they sit swinging on the cat-tails; to follow their flight over the glistening green, dipping, rising, circling in matchless curves, — is not all this well worth the sacrifice of a morning nap?

But the marsh is a faithful keeper and guards its secrets well. Much hard work, many discomforts, some danger, and small success will often be the sum total of a day spent there. The little marsh people are shy and very, very wily. Of twenty-nine marsh wren's nests examined in one day only one had eggs in it, the rest being either dummy or last year's nests. Afterwards the same proportion was encountered in another marsh.

The nest we had chosen to watch was in the centre of a little island of rushes separated from the main marsh by a passage just wide enough to punt a duckboat through. Here we lay, partly concealed, while the anxious little father scolded and sang by turns, and then with deliberate intention to deceive, commenced to build a

## MARSH CRADLES

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dummy nest in full view of us. Evidently his heart was not in his work, or our presence made him nervous, for it was not well done and he left it one-third completed to commence another a few feet farther away. This was repeated day after day, until four had been started and two finished in a radius of ten feet by the same industrious builder. All the material brought was wet, having just been picked from the water. He was a handsome happy little chap, in a coat of brightest brown and cream buff, much more attractive than his relative, the short-billed marsh wren, and more musical. The song of the short-billed is like a shrill childish chatter, only ceasing from lack of breath, while the long-billed is a clear, silvery tinkle like a chime of silver bells. The nests can scarcely be distinguished, but I think those of the long-billed are more carefully concealed and less likely to be "dummy."

Not once did he go near his real treasure. The four beautiful tiny brown eggs were

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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housed in the oldest, most tumble-down house of them all. One would never suspect it of being selected for a home among so many fresh green new ones. The doorway also was on the inland side, so that it looked to be only a ball of dried water-grass among the rushes. The doors of the dummy nests, on the contrary, were usually in plain view from the lake and invited inspection. The exposed position allowed the fierce sun to beat upon the little dwelling in full force, and I wondered whether the thick walls and roof were for the purpose of shelter from the heat or to protect from chill. They are so damp one would suppose the eggs might all be addled, but I have never found this to be the case. Marsh hawks and musk-rats cannot reach the eggs through the tiny doorway, so the enemies most to be feared are the numerous varieties of water-snakes. These twist around the reeds which support the nest, and by their weight break it from its fastenings, and overturn it after they have gorged themselves upon its

## MARSH CRADLES

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contents. The brave wrens have a serious time guarding their homes from these marauders, and a dread seized us each morning lest the treasure in this one be gone. But so



“Two is company.”

well surrounded and concealed was it that the brood was reared without mishaps, and five little marsh wrens were safely launched into a world of waving green.

It took fifteen days for the eggs to hatch, and afterwards such a long, long time before the first downy head peeped through the doorway. The mother was not a close sitter, whether because of our presence or because she knew the warm sun would help in her task. It was certainly steaming inside that round ball, and the tiny eggs felt

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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like hot pebbles to my prying fingers. She left for two hours at a time, and this, with an open nest in a tree, would certainly prove fatal to the eggs after incubation has begun. Often and often I feared that she had deserted it entirely, and began to reproach myself as being the cause, but always, just as my conscience became seriously alarmed, she slipped back, noiselessly as a wee brown mouse. I never saw the father bring her food or notice her at all, yet no move of hers escaped his watchful eyes.

On the morning the first egg hatched there was a change in the vicinity of that small homestead. The father, no longer at his post scolding, was either silently flitting to the nest with small bugs in his beak or singing his merriest several feet farther away than usual, trying by every art to attract attention to himself. But we cautiously pushed up to the doorway, and on finding there were young, cut a slit in the top of the nest to look at them. Four naked pinky nestlings, with wee heads, mere nobs

## MARSH CRADLES

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for eyes, and buds for wings, lay cuddled down within. After satisfying our curiosity we tied the slit up with rushes and left them. Before we could push the boat away the little mother had entered the nest not two feet away from us. Four days later we went again. Their eyes had begun to open, and a light brown down covered their bodies. The funny holes for ears, so apparent in all naked young birds, were even more conspicuous on them, and the little slits between the eyelids, only half open, gave them a very sleepy look. Bill and legs were a soft, burnt-orange color, shading to light. Fearing to disturb them too much by photographing them in their immature state, we gently replaced them in the nest and left them for another week.

Six days later we visited the nest again, and found them so far grown that one was being crowded through the doorway tail first. Again we untied the slit and took them out one by one. They were beautiful babies! Exactly like their handsome little father.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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Cream-buff downy feathers covered the breast and sides, merging into pure white on the belly. The head, wings, and tiny stub of a tail were cinnamon-brown. Bills and legs were still verging on the burnt-orange color, but shading to darker rather than light.

I said "tails," but really they had only "promises" or none at all, and the rump was alarmingly bald through the thin down. The little oil sack could plainly be seen, and was much more conspicuous than in the case of birds who nest away from the water. Yet I have never known the marsh wrens to bathe with unusual frequency, or to like the water any better than their land cousins.

As in the case of most young birds, we had to teach them to perch; and a comical task it was. The tiny claws had never learned to clasp, and yet by instinct they fastened to the rushes, and the little ball of down tried to balance itself on its uncertain little legs. I stood always with a hand ready to catch one in case of an unlucky



## MARSH CRADLES

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tumble. They liked to cuddle down on our fingers or hop up my arm to the shoulder, and took especial delight in hiding inside my shirtwaist sleeve, entering at the wrist, which the heat had compelled me to unfasten.

They were certainly the very prettiest of all our bird babies, unless we except the young chickadee, — when the question becomes a choice between soft grays or browns and white. Being so much more helpless than the chickadees, they appealed to my heart as no other feathered babies ever have done.

As soon as we had placed them nicely within focus of the camera on the rushes, one would decide to snuggle up a bit closer to his neighbor, and the next moment the four would perform feats of tumbling not seen in any vaudeville. Some of the feathers were not entirely out, and this seemed to bother them, for their little heads were constantly turning back in frantic efforts to preen their funny apologies for

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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wings, thereby upsetting themselves a dozen times.

After photographing we followed our usual rule and returned them to the nest.



A handful of babies

Immediately a little head popped out of the doorway, followed by a ball of fluffy brown and white, which scrambled at once up onto the roof of the little house and sat there. It was followed by another, who did exactly the same thing, except that he tumbled and caught hold of one of the bulrushes, and after some struggling regained his balance and reached a place beside his brother.

## MARSH CRADLES

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This was their first taste of freedom, and how they revelled in it! Looking about over the wide stretch of waving green marsh-grass, they chirped a startling imitation of their father's tinkling song and quivered with delight. Not once had one of the four opened his mouth as if hungry, even when left alone. After a reasonable length of time we tucked them back in the nest again and, tired out, they were glad to stay there.

During the hour or two we were playing with the babies the father and mother remained within a few feet, calling somewhat anxiously but not greatly alarmed. I held a little one out on my hand and went almost up to the mother before she took wing. Had not the great heat ( $106^{\circ}$ ) driven us out of the marsh, I am sure more patience in waiting would have conquered her fear of me, and she would have fed him on my hand. Before we were four feet away, she had returned to them with a fat June bug in her beak, and all was serene again in the little home.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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To see the first flight of those babies required no small effort, but we felt well repaid. Just as the sun came out from behind the hills and peeped into the small round doorway, a tiny brown head appeared, then out came the wee bird, evidently assisted from behind by a too eager brother or sister. He made his way onto a rush and clung there until out came a second, and aiming for the same perch, sent him tumbling to another; a third flew from the door to a cat-tail without mishap. The father came near with food, and called; with confidence of ignorance the first baby let go his hold, and managed, half fluttering, half scrambling over the marsh-grass, to reach the proffered breakfast. The second and third were not long in following suit, and both received well-earned reward. Then, with appetites surfeited, they blinked sleepily and dozed, while the parents, distracted between guarding them and watching me, were busy and unhappy. But where were the others? No more heads appeared in

## MARSH CRADLES

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the doorway. A gentle shaking failed to start any. A finger put cautiously in found it empty. The other two had either been stolen or had flown the day before and were hidden in the grass. We searched as best we might and could find no trace of them, nor did we see them with the old birds afterwards, although we kept watch for days. Then we remembered having passed a large water-snake coiled up on the bank not far from the nest with a half-swallowed bird sticking out of his mouth. So disgusting was the sight that I had hurried by without investigating, never dreaming it might be one of my baby wrens.

## A MARSH MYSTERY

Shall I call thee bird,  
Or but a wandering voice ?

WORDSWORTH.

**T**O be lost in the maze of a wild-rice marsh, although an unpleasant experience, is not without its compensation. Usually the latter is more apparent afterwards than during the anxiety of the moment, but this was not the case on the day I heard and saw my first sora rail. It was a warm day in early June when, punting our boat through a narrow channel, we made a wrong turn and immediately lost our bearings. In and out among the rushes we pushed our way only to become more and more bewildered. Not one familiar spot could we see ; not a single bulrush that we had ever passed before. Tired out at length, we concluded to lie still and, Micawber-like, wait for something to turn up. A hush

## A MARSH MYSTERY

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was over everything, the yellow-headed blackbird had long forgotten to sing, when suddenly from the water under our boat or from the rushes on this side and on that came weird cries, not of earth and certainly not of heaven. The Man with the Camera looked at me and raised a warning finger for silence. Breathlessly I waited, expecting to see nothing less than old god Pan emerge from the rushes. Nothing like this had I ever heard before, and the possibilities were almost overpowering. After a long time, during which the strange noises continued, we caught sight of something skulking through the reeds at the edge of the open water. Our eyes interrogatively telegraphed the one word "Rail?" and then we watched more breathlessly than before. The little creature stood motionless for several minutes, its dull plumage rendering it safely inconspicuous, and only its queer whistling call proclaiming it kin to the birds rather than to the little marsh people,—the musk-rats, frogs, or turtles. Presently it

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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walked out along the edge of the bog with a funny bobbing motion of its short tail, and



Sora rail's nest and eggs

stood revealed to us. Too small for a least bittern, it yet followed somewhat the same lines and coloring; but here the resemblance ended, for the method of locomotion was quite different. At every few strides it ducked its head into the slime, bringing

out some invisible dainty, which it swallowed with great eagerness. A catch of what looked to be a crab caused me to move suddenly, and instantly the bird was skimming over the water, half flying, half swimming, uttering a shrill alarm call until it



## A MARSH MYSTERY

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disappeared. Not so the alarm call. For an indescribable medley of sounds arose on all sides, — whistles, squeals, squawks, — and then a silence as sudden as the alarm had been. Thinking there might be a nest near by, we at once punted to the spot where we had first seen the bird, and which seemed somewhat solid ; then, wading out to a hump that would bear his weight, my companion looked eagerly about. Must we confess that good fortune and not science had led him to the right place, and there, not two feet away, was the nest. Of the six eggs all were hatched but one, and the nest was yet warm, showing how recently it had been occupied. Diligent search failing to reveal any trace of the newly hatched “chicks,” we pushed out into the open and lay down in the boat to await further developments. “All things come to those who wait,” but in the study of wild life, whether of forest or marsh, the one essential seems to be patience in waiting, — long and *silent* waiting. The sun had long since passed the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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meridian, and the cool shadows gathering beneath the tall rice warned us that the day was waning, when suddenly the long silence



A baby rail

was broken by the same peculiar noises as before. Confused as to the direction of their source, we knew not where to look, when on a point of rush-covered mud flat that separated two channels, we saw five or six tiny downy chicks of a glossy black, with funny

large feet and necks too long for their fat little bodies. Otherwise they looked exactly like bantam babies, and ran about in the same lively fashion as their farm-yard cousins, while a continual "peep-

## A MARSH MYSTERY

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ing" noise confirmed the resemblance. Finally the mother emerged from the denser reeds, and strutted about with a queer mincing gait and self-satisfied air, very much as a motherly old hen might do. Once she forgot her dignity and ran post-haste for a bug, with her long neck stretched out and her legs propelling rather than supporting her body. Undoubtedly the male bird was the one who had uttered the strange cries, for the female was silent as long as we watched her.

To photograph this interesting family was obviously impossible, both on account of the swaying screen of rushes which hid us, and the fading light. Just as we had decided to attempt the capture of at least one of the five babies, we heard human voices approaching. The rails heard also, and vanished so utterly and so silently that I wondered whether they had really been there at all. Vexatious as this interruption was, it aroused us to a sense of our "lost" condition, and, standing up to halloo, we saw the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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other boat pass within a few yards of us. No time was wasted in hesitation; we pushed out and followed them, joining heartily in the laugh at our own expense. It was, to be sure, a trifle humiliating to find that we really had not been lost at all, for we were in the main channel. When once out of the rushes and in the open water of the lake, we floated along the edge of the marsh until the scarlet and gold of the sunset changed to purple shadows which, in turn, became silvery mists beneath the moon. Weird sounds, made more ghostly by the hour and place, came ever from the waving wild rice,—suppressed grunts, sighs, and moans. One thought of the lost souls of Dante's *Inferno*, or of Poe's hideous imagery,—

“ They are neither man nor woman,  
They are neither brute nor human,  
They are ghouls.”

The unknown became the supernatural, too mysterious for comfort, and in spite of the beauty of the night a strange sense of fear made one long to get away.

## A MARSH MYSTERY

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Early the next morning we went again to the vicinity of our adventure, hoping to catch sight of the little brood ; but although the same queer noises were heard on all



Immature sora rail

sides, we saw nothing of the rails. Rowing around a floating bog, we came suddenly upon a least bittern, who instantly stiffened into statue-like imitation of his surroundings, and trusted to his protective coloring to escape notice. As we pushed toward him, and he knew he was discovered, he retreated through the rushes with the strangest gymnastics. Grasping a reed stalk in each foot, he strode rapidly from stalk to stalk, pausing

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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once to look back over his shoulder, as it were. It was a most comical exit, and deserved the applause we dared not give.

Many times have we sought to solve the mystery of the marsh music, but always with small success, and our next adventure with the rails was in our own dooryard at Evans-ton. Looking out of my library window one September morning, I saw my small kitten driving a young rail before her by cuffing it gently, first with one paw and then with the other. The bird made no attempt to escape, but soon turned, faced the kitten, and, lying down on its back, fought with both feet and bill. The effect was as ridiculous as if a small boy should turn at bay and make faces at a tormenting bully, and surprised the kitten into a momentary cessation of the play, — for such it was, without any idea of catching the bird. The latter allowed me to pick it up, and appeared neither exhausted nor frightened. It was an immature specimen, and became tame at once. In order to have even a moderately

## A MARSH MYSTERY

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clear day for photographing him, we were obliged to keep him in durance vile for three weeks, on a diet of snails, ants' eggs, and hens' eggs hard boiled. Several times he escaped, and was recaptured without difficulty. When the day of his final release came, we took him to the outskirts of a prairie, and he flew farther and more vigorously than he ever had flown before, thereby proving his good health under captivity.

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

Tripping light as a sandpiper over the beach,  
Swerving this way and that, as the wave of the moment  
Washes out its slight trace with a dash of the foam on 't.

LOWELL.

**O**N the beach near our camp was the nest of a spotted sandpiper, or "teeter," a fascinating little bird familiar to all dwellers by inland lakes. He had chosen a beautiful spot for his home at the foot of a clump of pink clover, where the ground sloped gently to the water's edge. The nest was of dry grass moulded to roundness, and partly covered by the overhanging clover blossoms. But for flushing the mother, we might not have discovered it. In it were four dull buff eggs, thickly blotched with purplish brown. The little mother sat very close, and we never once went to the nest without finding her there.





PLATE VI

*Nest of Spotted Sandpiper exposed*

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

Tripping light as a sandpiper over the beach,  
Swerving this way and that, as the wave of the moment  
Washes out its slight trace with a dash of the foam on't.

LOWELL.

ON the beach near our camp was the nest of a ~~iv-stad~~ sandpiper, or "teeter," ~~as long as required to the bird's view~~ familiar to all dwellers by inland lakes. He had chosen a beautiful spot for his home at the foot of a clump of pink clover, where the ground sloped gently to the water's edge. The nest was of dry grass moulded to roundness, and partly covered by the overhanging clover blossoms. But for flushing the mother, we might not have discovered it. In it were four dull buff eggs, thickly blotched with purplish brown. The little mother sat very close, and we never once went to the nest without finding her there.





## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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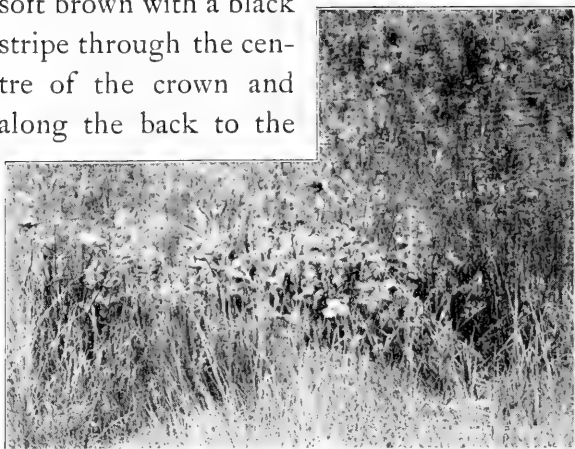
Only a few feet of beach lay between her and her daily supply of food, and that was perhaps the reason why the father bird was not present during incubation. As soon, however, as the little ones were hatched, he assumed his share of parental duties and stood guard about ten feet away. The day they left the shells they stayed in the nest, or at least near it, and that night we found them cuddled with their mother in a hollow a foot away. Only three of the eggs hatched, and I fancy some enemy was close at hand, for I never saw more than two of the bantlings. The next morning they had gone over to the meadow, and only by long search were we able to catch them for their pictures. As luck would have it, the sun hid behind dull gray clouds all day, and we were finally obliged to content ourselves with very unsatisfactory results.

It was amusing to watch the small sandpipers as they teetered down to the edge of the water with a funny little bobbing motion, in exact imitation of their elders, their long

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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slender legs seeming scarcely strong enough to carry them. They were covered with soft down of beautiful color and markings, the under parts being pure white, the upper soft brown with a black stripe through the centre of the crown and along the back to the



Sandpiper's nest, skilfully concealed

tail. This was crossed at right angles and also obliquely by bars of black that centred on the nape, as if Greek and Roman crosses were laid one over the other with the middle cross-piece at the back of the neck.

As spry as little chickens, they ran about picking up their food and needing little

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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attention from their parents. They seemed to know instinctively in which direction the water lay, for they made straight for it, sometimes walking out on the lily-pads. The water does not seem to wet through the thick down that covers them, and they had no fear of it. I never have seen the parents swim, and fancy they seldom wade, preferring to pick up the little bugs from the moist sand. They were quite timid and kept at a long distance from us, so that it was impossible to photograph the mother at the nest or afterwards with her young. In a day or so they learned to hide in the deep holes made by the feet of cattle, and although we were assured of their proximity by the distress of the parent birds, a long search failed to discover them. However, one evening, strolling over their favorite feeding-ground by moonlight, when all well-behaved babies are abed, I was startled by the flight of two "teeters" at my feet, and feeling softly all around, I at last found the ten-day-old sandpipers snuggled down close together in a

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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hole six inches deep, apparently too dazed by sleep to run away. A tenderness of heart that I have since regretted compelled me to



Sandpiper's babies hiding on the sand

leave them where they were and remove my intruding self.

Almost as shy was an upland plover whom we found with her young on the roadside. We captured two of the babies, and with much difficulty induced them to sit for their portraits, although the day was too cloudy for a successful exposure. The mother was much excited over this proceed-



## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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ing, and flying from fence-post to fence-post and down to the tall grass, gave utterance continually to piteous cries of distress, more like a whistle or "cherr" than a bird note. It was a weird ventriloquistic sound impossible to describe, —

"The fresh, free cry of a prairie rover,  
The uncaged call of an upland plover."

They were evidently only a day old, and the empty nest with broken shells was hidden on the level ground just inside the edge of a clover-field. It was even a less pretentious nest than the sandpipers', being only a slight depression in the earth with small attempt at lining or concealment. The five eggshells were buffy white, spotted with chocolate and quite pointed. The nest was still warm, as if they had not been long away, and I wondered whether they would go back to sleep that night in the old nursery. However, this was some twelve miles from our camping-place, so we were not able to see.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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It is strange how early ground-birds leave the nest. I doubt if plover, quail, partridge, snipe; or any of their kin remain in the nursery more than two or three hours, or longer



A spry little "teeter"

than just enough for the down to dry out well. A nest of ruffed grouse that contained nine eggs at eight A. M. was empty with broken shells scattered about at noon, and one little fellow was caught running off with the egg-shell still on his back. This is young America indeed, and such enterprise deserves more than a passing notice.

There were said to be no quail in the neighborhood, but we were fortunate enough to run across a family of them in a fence corner on the hillside. On one side was a field of lush red clover, its full pink blossoms reflecting the glory of the sunset sky ;

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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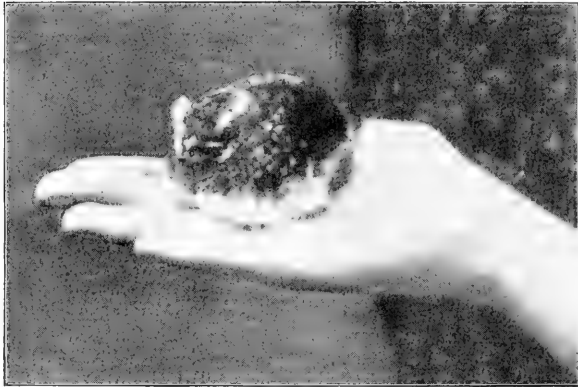
for, alas! this also was late in the afternoon, too late for good work with the camera. The mother quail disappeared instantly in the underbrush, giving a peculiar call, and all the brood vanished into the earth somewhere. At least so protective is their coloring, and so perfectly were these day-old babies trained to obey, that hunt as we would we were able to find but one of the many. This one flattened himself on a bare spot of earth, shut his eyes, and remained motionless. When picked up, he cuddled down contentedly in my little daughter's hand, and tried to "look pleasant" for his picture.

It is often most difficult to pose these lively bird babies; some — notably the woodpeckers — cannot even squat on a flat surface; some cannot be taught to perch at all; and some, like young bluebirds, persist in diving head foremost off any perch, thus compelling the would-be-photographer to hold a shield under them and break their fall. A young coot we caught utterly re-

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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fused to pose in any position whatever, and his movements were so swift even "instantaneous" failed to get him as he left the field of vision. We kept him prisoner for



Baby quail in the hand

two days, hoping to study him ; and a tamer, prettier baby could nowhere be found. He knew how to feed himself perfectly, and although so tiny was as independent as possible. About half the size of a little chicken, he was covered with thick black down over his body and funny little wings. His long blackish-green legs and scalloped toes proclaimed him a wader ; and his pointed beak,

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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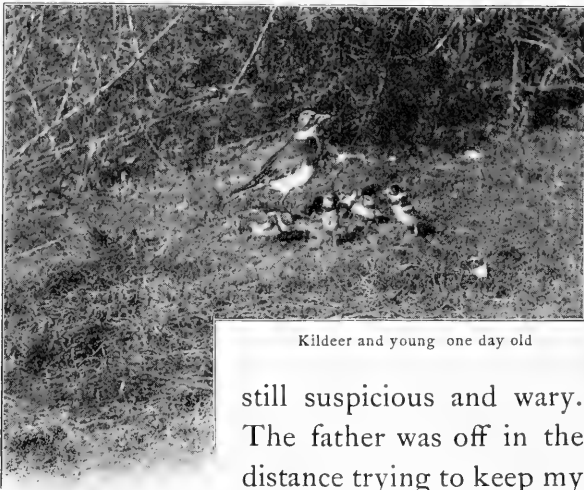
tipped with white and mottled at the upper end with dark brown, was curiously like his mamma's. In running he spread his little wings like an ostrich, and hid in the grass with astonishing rapidity. Poor baby! His was a sad fate, for he ate the poisoned dye of some fur thrown over him as a "brooder." We found him dead from the effects.

One bright day in June we came upon a family of kildeer consisting of a mother and five little ones. Resolving to try for their photos, the Man with the Camera concealed it in a bush and, retiring thirty feet, lay down behind a stone-pile. The old bird had become much alarmed upon the first suspicion of danger, and flew overhead uttering her plaintive "kildee, kildee." The young could not fly, and were only just out of the shell; so after some lively chasing I captured four of them, one by one. Placing them in approximate range of the camera, I went to a distant part of the field, hoping the mother would go to them. This she did

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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almost immediately, and led or drove them toward the bushes, believing herself safe, yet



Kildeer and young one day old

still suspicious and wary. The father was off in the distance trying to keep my attention fixed upon him where I was, three hundred feet away. The young were beautiful creatures, marked with dark rings around their necks like the parents, and ran like little chickens, peeping in the same high key but with an upward inflection, making two distinct syllables of the note, "pee-ep."

The mother was so timid it was difficult

## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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to get near her. Much more shy than the plover, she took to flight while the latter sat on a fence-post and called "churr." This little family stayed in the neighborhood several weeks, and were to be seen nearly every day. The efforts of the little ones to learn to fly were comical. At first the wings were lifted in running, and when they were two weeks old they could not rise from the ground more than half an inch, but scudded along as do little ostriches. They seemed to pick up their own food from the very first, and I never saw the mother feed them. Long before the sun had dried the dew, they scurried over the wet stubble, and later, when other bird babies were abed, they were still running about.

When they were three weeks old, I again caught one to photograph, having made several failures in the mean time. This chase was even more lively than the first had been, and the mother showed greater distress, lying on the ground thirty feet

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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in front of me, fluttering with apparently broken wings, and almost rolling over and over to attract my attention, while the



Kildeer startled and about to run

father hovered over her also. This time, while I caught one, the rest rushed to cover, and all efforts to capture them failed. After much tribulation we at last induced the cap-

tive to remain within focus long enough for an "instantaneous."

Their story, like so many others concerning young birds, ends in a tragedy. One by one they were "missing." Was a ferret or a marsh-rat or a hungry owl the murderer? Only an Ernest Seton-Thompson can tell. Were the little ones stolen from under their mother at night, or lost in the



## SANDPIPERS, QUAIL, AND KILDEER

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tall grass during the day? Opinion was divided on this point, and no proof was ever obtained as to the cause of their disappearance. They were only one of the many bird families decimated by cruel prowlers. Often and often I have wondered that ever any nestling came to maturity. It is the smaller song-birds that are most often the victims, and pessimism insists that the day will come when no more bird-songs will be heard in our woods, only the shrill screams of the birds of prey, the caw of the crow, the shriek of the bluejay, and the melancholy hooting of the owl.

## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

Piercing out as trumpet shrill  
The flicker's challenge breaks  
From out the oaks which crown a hill  
That overlooks the lakes ;  
A long-drawn chattering cry elate,  
And then from his expectant mate  
A faint-heard answering cry replies  
From some far wooded rise.

McGAFFEY.

**R**OWING along the shore very early one morning, we passed a meadow fringed with heavy timber. The broken trunk of a solitary giant sycamore stood near the water's edge, leafless, almost branchless, its size alone telling its age and former glory. As we came in sight of it, a meadow lark sat on top piping merrily, and not two feet below him, on the side next the lake, a flicker busily excavated his dwelling. He had dug out about ten inches, and only his tail could be seen in the hole, bobbing vigorously as the chips flew. Through the field-





## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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glasses these could be seen falling in showers. He was making rapid progress. The meadow lark finished his song and left. When the silence attracted the attention of the busy miner, he ceased digging and appeared outside. As he caught sight of us, his attempts at concealment were ludicrous. With apparent nonchalance he pecked daintily first on one side of the tree, then the other, a few inches away from the original excavation. It was as if he said, "You see I am really not here on any especial business, simply hunting for my breakfast." He even sauntered leisurely to the top, and looked about indifferently, as if nothing in the world could interest him. And yet only two minutes before he had been working for dear life at a home in that very tree. I laughed aloud over his airs. He looked at me solemnly, as if amazed at such levity, and I assure you no owl can be more solemn and no catbird more crafty than a flicker. Several days before this I had watched him bowing and gesturing before the lady of his

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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choice, and was most heartily amused over his awkward but ardent wooing. He had chosen a dying oak-tree on the edge of this very wood for the trysting-place, and there he drummed a roundelay each morning and evening. Madam was coy and listened from a distance. Then he tried to coax her to him by calling, "Flicker, flicker, flicker," and "Quick, quick, quick," over and over again. Finally, when she came lazily, as if simply to be amused, he bowed, scraped, and swaggered, spread his tail, fluttered his golden-lined wings, and wooed her in soft undertones. Never had I supposed a flicker's voice could be so sweet. The same mellow tones were afterwards heard when this flicker came to feed his young. It is wonderful how the shrillest bird voices are modulated for baby ears. As he looked at me now, I seemed to see recognition and reproach in his stern unwinking gaze, as if he said, "Why do you trouble me? Are my affairs such a great joke?"

At length, disgusted at my persistent

## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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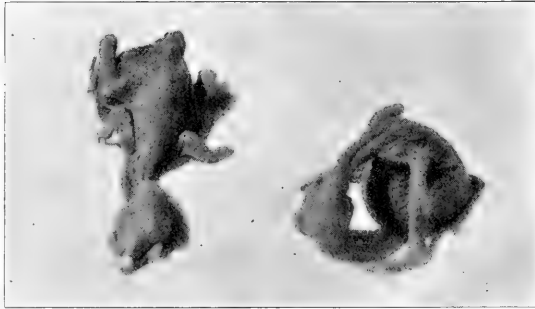
intrusion, Monsieur decided to abandon stratagem, and came down into the half-finished hole once more. Again the chips flew swiftly, interrupted only by pauses to look out at us.

Suddenly a flicker flew across the meadow, alighting on a tree a hundred and fifty feet away, and called. Instantly the worker stopped and listened; a second call, and without a moment's hesitation he flew to the side of the new-comer, and from there away for his breakfast. I waited to see Madam take his place at the work, and in about ten minutes she was there, coming so silently and secretly I could not tell how or from where. By the absence of the black cheek patches, I knew her to be the female. After she had worked half an hour a similar call was heard from the same tree across the meadow, and in response to it she flew away, though not to that part of the woods. With little delay and no stratagem this time, the male came back to resume his labor, evidently believing he was beyond our reach.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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A week later there were four eggs in the rude nest, so polished and transparent that they looked like pearls. We did not investigate again until two weeks later, when we



Squirming flicker babies, two days old

found six young flickers, featherless and squirming. The heat in the flicker's home was so much greater than that outside that curiosity prompted the insertion of a thermometer. It immediately rose to  $104^{\circ}$ , the outside temperature being  $96^{\circ}$ . The Man with the Camera resolved to render at least two of those newly-hatched flickers immortal as being the homeliest of all babies. Their bodies were as round and of the same



## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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size and color as the pink rubber balls the children use in playing jackstones. From the top of the body sprang two long legs, two appendages that might some day be called wings, but now looked more like earthworms, and a neck two inches long. Unfortunately they are foreshortened in the photograph, as is also the protruding lower mandible of the beak, so much of the ludicrous proportions are lost. Although they were so lively and squirming, they persisted in looking very dead in the picture. The one with his head tucked under was trying to brace himself by his long neck. Only politeness restrained the small boy spectator from shouting "Rubber, rubber," and in my heart I echoed the thought. As soon as possible we returned them to the nest. A week later we visited them again, and this time were greeted by a storm of hisses that sounded like a swarm of bees. It could be heard twenty feet away on the ground. One by one six half-fledged flickers were lifted out and lowered in a

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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sunbonnet to my hands. The necks had not shortened perceptibly, but the wings now had joints and the legs were more shapely. Also the very round bodies had lengthened and flattened so that they did not roll about so alarmingly. In spite of our soothing they kept their mouths open and hissed at intervals. The lower mandible was still longer than the upper, and the white tip was only slightly less conspicuous. The tongues were very long, very slender, whitish in color, and detached for a long distance back in the mouth and rather stiff.

After keeping them out long enough to examine carefully and photograph, we placed them in the sunbonnet once more and returned to the nest. Not once had the father and mother uttered a note of protest, or shown themselves in that vicinity, so I went back an hour later to see whether they had deserted. A smart rap brought Madam to the doorway, and like a flash she was gone from sight. All waiting for her to return was in vain.

## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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Two days later, in passing the flicker tree, I saw a little head hanging out of the doorway in a perfectly lifeless way, and concluded some accident had befallen the nestlings. But even as I looked, a second head appeared beside the first, and the latter at once raised itself, and joined, open-mouthed, in a clamor for food. Concealed behind some bushes, I waited to see the feeding; and after a short time the father alighted a few inches below, and at one side of the nest-hole. Although they could not see him, they heard his arrival, for three little heads were stretched out, filling the doorway. He looked at them a moment, as if deciding which one was the hungriest or most deserving, and placed his beak in the open mouth of the nearest. The little fellow hung on bravely while the old bird shook him up and down, much as you have seen women shake pillows into cases. This finished, after a moment's pause to catch his breath, the father repeated the pumping and shaking with the two others. Then, in spite of continued hungry

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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cries, he retired out of sight behind the nest to watch and listen, only his head showing, in attitude of attention. He remained there, motionless, as long as the nestlings cried, and when all was quiet in the nest he slipped away. I was strongly reminded of certain nursery scenes I had witnessed, where a patient mother waited out of sight for a refractory baby to go to sleep, not daring to leave it crying, and yet not wishing to humor it. The food brought had of course been given by regurgitation; but I am positive it had not been completely digested, for I distinctly saw the end of the body of a moth or grub sticking out sidewise from the bill of one of the babies after the father had finished feeding him.

As we watched this brood develop day after day, the equalization of labor between father and mother impressed me greatly. If either could be said to be the more tireless in caring for the young, it was the father. He slept on a crotch a foot away from the hole, and the mother, after the first week,

## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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spent the night on top of the trunk. Those babies were fed each hour, with clocklike regularity, according to the latest ideas as to bringing up a family.

Whether there were more than three in the nest at that time or not, only three heads were visible at each feeding, and when, a week later, I watched them fly, there were but three. There had been six up to the time they were a week old, but the others may have made their *début* unknown to me. These three we persuaded to come out a little earlier than they had planned, and pose for us on the trunk of the tree. It was their first view of life, and they were somewhat amazed. This time the parents remained near, and called with their peculiar shrill cry of anger. As soon as we left they were beside the little ones, feeding them as before.

A young flicker's first flight is particularly strong, and one of these covered a distance of one hundred feet before alighting. They followed the parents closely for at least two weeks, and, so far as I could discover, were

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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fed by them entirely. Until they were ten days out of the nest, the feeding seemed to be partly by regurgitation, and partly direct, as other young birds are fed. Later I saw them on the naked ant-hills that are so distinctly a flicker's feeding-ground, and they were apparently helping themselves; but the same day the parents again fed them.

The method of teaching them to forage for themselves was most interesting. Fat grubs were brought and shown to a hungry youngster, but instead of being given to him direct, were partly tucked under a strip of bark, where he could see them and help himself. In the same way ant-hills were opened for him, and the white ant-eggs exposed, but not fed to him. Finding that all entreaties were in vain, he soon learned that he must work if he would eat.

For several days, just at evening the weather became quite stormy, and I fancy the young flickers slept in the old nest every night, as well as sought it for shelter from

## THE BIRD OF MANY NAMES

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the rain, for they were there at sunrise each morning.

After they had finally deserted it, examination showed it to be seventeen and a half inches deep, and the original doorway about three inches in diameter. As to the thirty-six common names with which some books credit this inoffensive bird, I have wondered what he has done to deserve them all. Surely the half-dozen most commonly used are sufficient.

## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

How does he know where to dig his hole,  
The woodpecker there, on the elm-tree pole ?  
How does he know what kind of a limb  
To use for a drum or to burrow in ?

LONG.

**T**HE red-headed woodpecker is one of those birds who prefer old homesteads year after year, and the bird whose history I am going to tell nested for five seasons in the same dead tree just south of my nursery window. During that time he excavated two dwellings in it, and the discarded one he used as a shelter for himself on cold rainy days when Madam was on the nest. A light summer shower, however, was his delight, and the only bath I ever saw him take. Although robins and wood-thrushes daily bathed in a basin set out for them, Red-head never would go to the ground for it.



## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

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He at first came to the tree alone, looked it over and tapped it vigorously, then flew away. In an hour he was there again, this time with his mate. She evidently approved his choice of location, for she sat contentedly above him while he struck out the circle for the doorway. After that both worked at the excavations alternately for intervals of



Young red-headed woodpecker leaving nest

about twenty minutes each. Most of this was done early in the morning before the folks in the house were supposed to be astir; for although neither a shy nor timid bird, the red-head resents any notice of his domestic affairs. Whenever any one appeared on the veranda he would stop

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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work, mount the top of the stump, and scold, emphasizing every squawk with a comical jerk of his entire body. It was as though he pumped out the tone. We always knew when puss was abroad on the lawn by the continuous succession of harsh squawks that came from the woodpecker's tree or a roof near by. The old trunk was barkless and smooth, with only a forked branch at the top some twenty feet from the ground, so I am sure he had no reason to fear that any wicked feline could reach that precious nest. In this home-guarding he was invariably assisted by an officious English sparrow, who perched on one fork of the branch and scolded his loudest with important little tail-waggings. When there were pretty white eggs in the nest and Madam was away for food, the sparrow was always to be seen at his post, and often seemed to call her back impatiently if she lingered. His own babies, hatched under the eaves of my nursery, were of minor importance. They were even allowed

## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

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to sit side by side on a clothes-post in the yard, with little mouths open and wings quivering for food, while he took care of his neighbor's children.

The red-heads never seemed to resent this but once. Then there were young in the nest, and both parents had gone for food. During their absence I saw Monsieur Meddlesome go to the nest-hole several times and look in. Each time a little woodpecker head had been sticking out, and was hastily withdrawn at his approach. Whether he objected to their looking out or whether he was simply curious, I never knew, but he finally went clear inside the nest and stayed some time. I thought he was murdering the infants, but just as the mother came in sight away he flew, and a baby head peered out to watch his flight. However welcome the foster nurse was to the lonely little woodpeckers, the parents sorely resented the intrusion. With indescribable fury the mother followed him, and but for his ability in dodging and the red-head's awkwardness,

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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there had been one less English sparrow. But he gained his own domicile safely, and there the red-head drummed and screamed



On the lookout

in impotent rage. I supposed she was driving a hole through the thin boards into his nest, but she apparently contented herself with frightening him and his babies into a series of spasms.

Meanwhile the father returned and fed the youngsters, retired to his usual seat on the top, and began his customary squawking. As soon as the mother saw him, she left the sparrow and took her place near him for an instant, just long enough to tell him, of the outrage, then went into her own nest. But the moment that sparrow left the eaves she

## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

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was on the alert, leaning far out the doorway and shaking a figurative fist at him. The next day he fought shy of the tree, but the second day he had apparently forgotten his fright, or else he alighted there in sheer bravado. Instantly Madam drove him away; but the moment her back was turned he was there again, alighting behind her. This was kept up at intervals all day. The next day he spent on a maple quite near, watching his chance. The very moment both red-heads flew away he was on their tree, taking full charge as before, and much excited over the proximity of the cat. Finally, after spending three-fourths of their time in driving him away, the sensible woodpeckers decided to ignore him, and he was thereafter on guard as long as the tree remained standing.

There were always either eggs or young in the red-head's nest from May 15 to July 31 each year. Often there were fresh-laid eggs, newly hatched babies, and nestlings ready to fly, in the nest at once. This kept

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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both parents busy, and yet whenever a little one tried his wings the father was there to take care of him.

At the foot of the tree were colonies of black beetles, — the red-head's larder, as it were, — and from it he carried these to the young, both inside and out of the nest, on an average of three a minute at six o'clock in the evening. I do not know whether he fed them by regurgitation during their earliest babyhood or not, but it was never done at the doorway, as is the case with the flickers. Although sparrows' nests were numerous and exposed, I am positive he never robbed them. In a hollow part of the tree after it fell were nut shells, dead beetles, and grasshoppers, evidently stored from mere love of hoarding.

The young red-heads seemed to be on the point of flying for a week or so before they actually left the nest, and during all that time we were ever on the *qui vive*. Each year when the crisis finally came, my head was sure to be turned in the opposite direc-

## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

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tion, although for an hour previously I had not dared look away, and the birdling would be out like a flash before I could realize it.

Fortunately a brood which we were watching in an old tree in the forest were less shy. The oldest son of this family sat in the doorway a long time making up his mind to try his fortunes, then crawled out and sat on top of the stump in which his home was located. The absence of any red on his gray head and the narrower stripes of black and white on his back made him look very unlike his parents. He remained on the stump all day, fed as usual but making no effort to help himself. Afterwards I saw him following a downy woodpecker about and begging with cries and quivering wings to be fed. And dainty Madam Downy fed him as patiently as though he were not twice as big as she.

One night, when the little family in my yard were about ready to fly, a hard wind and rain storm wrecked houses and tore down trees. Among the latter was the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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home of our red-heads. We watched it sway, and realizing how the beetles had riddled it at the ground, we feared the worst. Both birds were in it, and as their doorways were toward the west, they faced the full fury of the storm. At last a harder blast caused it to rock once or twice and then fall. As it went over, out flew both parents and one young bird. The rain came in torrents, and whether the little one was beaten to earth or whirled away by the wind and killed, I never knew, for we never found him. After the storm was over and the sun came out for a farewell look at the ruin the wind had wrought, the poor woodpeckers came back likewise. As if not realizing what had happened, they circled over and around the spot where the tree had stood, always at about the former height of their nest. It was as if they still expected to find it there and could not understand the mystery. On the ground in the broken trunk, exposed to full view, lay a nestling fully feathered, one just hatched, and the



## THE HOUSE THAT FELL

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smashed remains of several eggs; but not once did the bewildered parents notice them. Their sole idea was to find the nest where for four years they had never failed of finding it.

Until the darkness fell they hovered about the place with wild cries of distress, and the next morning they were back again. After that they disappeared, and they have never visited the spot since. We miss them greatly, and we miss the cheery reveille on our tin roof that used to waken us so early in the morning, telling us that the birds' day had begun. The little sparrow seemed to miss them also, for he sat all day in the maple and talked about the tragedy. And I understood his feelings, if not his language.

## DR. JEKYLL

The noisy jay,  
Jargoning like a foreigner at his food.

LONGFELLOW.

**D**ID he who wrote "fine feathers do not make fine birds," have the blue jay in mind, I wonder? For nowhere does a handsome coat cover rougher manners or blacker heart. For years I refused to believe him a cannibal, even against trustworthy testimony, but recently I have myself witnessed his villany. A great disturbance at five o'clock in the morning in a tree where there was a pewee's nest, brought me to the window just in time to see a blue jay fly away with a nestling in his bill, pursued by the parent pewees and several vireos. The next morning this was repeated, and the next, until there were no more little pewees in the ravaged domicile. It was heart-rending, but nothing could be done.

On another occasion my attention was attracted to three jays sneaking about a barn. One hopped up the roof on one side with curious awkwardness, and down on the other to the eaves, where he stood peering over and underneath with diabolical leer. Another stood on a bar running out from the barn, also looking up, but with one eye on me, for he well knew his acts would not bear watching. The third perched on top of a lean-to which ran nearly to the eaves, and was completely absorbed in something underneath also. Suspecting mischief, I investigated. Sure enough, there were fifty or more swallows' nests, some with eggs and some with young, glued fast to the side of the barn. In nearly every little doorway a head was looking out watching. The poor little mothers dared not leave even for food, while those hungry ogres were there waiting to seize their young.

At least twenty of the song-birds' nests I found in one season were devastated by jays. As a rule they punctured the eggs and

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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sucked the contents, leaving the empty shells behind. A snake or a crow swallows the eggs or carries them away without breaking; a red squirrel tears the nest in such a



Dr. Jekyll

way there is no mistaking his handiwork, and a jay sucks the eggs if fresh; otherwise he too carries them away at least a few feet, breaks them, and eats the embryo. I have even thought he deliberately waits for the egg to develop, preferring newly hatched young to raw albumen, for he has been seen near nests day after day, and robbed

them only after the nestlings had broken the shell.

It is hard to write such things of a bird who was once a prime favorite of mine, but, if true, they must be told. With all his faults, I love him still. He is so dashing, so handsome, and so intelligent. When a family of jays was rendered homeless by a storm, I adopted one of the babies, and his funny tricks and manners were a source of unending amusement. He learned to mimic whistles, calls, water pouring from a carafe (his cage was in the dining-room), and essayed the song of a pet canary, greatly to the latter's disgust. His favorite occupation was hiding everything small enough to be carried in his bill. If objects rolled too far out of reach, a torrent of blue-jay profanity rushed from his throat. The words might be unintelligible, but there was no mistaking the sentiment. In direct contrast to this he sometimes sat as close to me as he could get and whispered in a confidential undertone, musical as a silver bell. It was the same

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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sweet, low coaxing with which I have heard him woo his mate at four o'clock in the morning, and afterwards soothe his beloved



Nest and eggs of the jay

nestlings. For a blue jay can be gentle, and no bird of my acquaintance is such a devoted father. Robins will sometimes abandon their young if the latter are maimed, and I have known them to refuse to feed a blind nestling after he had left the home tree. But blue jays defend and care for their own kind. There is an *esprit de corps* in the entire family which leads them to stand by each other,—a jolly good fellowship, as it were. Two robins may quarrel, two orioles often do, but blue jays never. If a young jay is taken from one nest and placed in another, he receives the same care

from his foster parents that their own young do. And yet these same foster parents will bring the nestlings of other birds to him for food.

This banding together of the jays on all occasions against a common foe helps to make them a terror to all woodland dwellers. I doubt whether even a hungry hawk would attempt to rob them, and hence the jays increase and the song birds decrease.

Early one morning I witnessed an amusing demonstration of the jay's peculiar devotion to his mate. Part of the lawn had been newly raked over with fresh earth, and here the two jays came for their breakfast, as well as to get food for their young. Their nest was across the street in the next block, about three hundred feet away. The male was either less hungry or more fortunate in hunting, for he finished some minutes before the female. Then, having gathered four large angle-worms in his beak, he flew to a low perch to wait for her. Seeing that she did not hurry, he expostulated gently with

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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her, even flying down beside her and reminding her of those hungry babies at home. Still she would not go. Then he flew to a half-way tree and waited again, calling her



One of the jay's victims :  
nest of swamp sparrow

softly. Every harsh jay note was gone from his voice, and it was as persuasive as that of a dove. He fidgeted somewhat over the delay, the four wriggling worms seemed hard to hold; but he would not leave her nor did he scold her. Finally, her own appetite appeased, she gathered a breakfast for the nestlings and joined him on the tree. Then he flew to the next, and waited again until she followed. The next flight was taken simultaneously to the nest tree, and each time they came together to the lawn for worms, they left together.



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This same jay had carried food to his mate on the nest every half-hour all day long, and relieved her at short intervals. At one such time when I happened to see him, he straddled the eggs as if afraid to squat upon them, although realizing that some such method was necessary to keep them warm. With head on one side he looked down upon them in masculine pride and awkwardness; then, suddenly catching sight of me, his whole manner changed. Instantly he was off the nest and hopping about with an elaborate assumption of indifference and contempt. Nothing in that nest interested *him!* It was probably a last year's catbird or tumble-down crow nest! There was n't a thing in it! He was merely looking to see whether a squirrel had left a nut there. Finally, as if to convince me, he flew away from the tree entirely.

Notwithstanding all their dash and boldness, the blue jays do not defend their homes from human hands, as do many other smaller birds, seeming to prefer stratagem. A

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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mother jay will usually leave without protest if there are only eggs in the nest, and if there are young she contents herself with squawking in close imitation of a catbird's "meouw."



Nests devastated by jays. Upper, red-eyed vireo.  
Lower, indigo bunting

And what homely babies are those newly hatched jays! Of a sickly greenish color, their skin seems tough, like leather. It is impossible to describe them in sufficiently repellent terms.

They look as if they had been dead for days and were mummified. Have the parent jays no sense of beauty, I wonder, that they regard these ugly nestlings with such tender pride?

The nest is coarser than that of a catbird, and with small pretence at lining, yet both male and female work assiduously in building it. Usually it is well concealed; often in an evergreen, sometimes in fruit trees, sometimes in tall hazel-bushes; but I have never found one in a thorn-bush. Since the nest often resembles that of the thrasher and catbird in material used, it seems a little strange that their favorite nesting-places are so persistently shunned. Is it possible the dashing jay feels himself so able to defend that he scorns such artificial protection for his home?

As soon as the young jays are large enough to leave the nest, they develop all the pugnacity and fearlessness of their father. When scarcely able to balance on their uncertain little legs, they will meet any advance with a defiant peck. For several weeks they keep close to the father night and day, learning all his sly tricks and villanous ways. I have seen a whole family waiting on a tree for the tiny owners of a yellow

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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warbler's nest to leave it unguarded. As if they knew their deeds were evil, their every look and act told of knavery, quite different from their usual gallant bearing. That night I came upon them sleeping in a bunch in the same tree, and felt certain that with the morning light there would be four less baby yellow-birds in the world. And so it is, that while I can almost hate the jays for their faults, I entirely love them for their beautiful coloring and their one virtue of family love. How much better are we than they? Or, rather, are we not much worse, since we kill for love of killing? Too often we have not even the blue jay's one virtue of loyalty to our own.





## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

A bird's nest. Mark it well within, without.  
No tool had he that wrought, no knife to cut,  
No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert,  
No glue to join ; his little beak was all.  
And yet how neatly finished ! What nice hand  
With every implement and means of art,  
And twenty years' apprenticeship, to boot,  
Could make me such another ?

HURDIS.

**T**HE chimney swift is an anomaly among our native birds, constructing a nest that is easily first in point of beauty and workmanship ; laying eggs so perfect in shape and translucent in texture as to be startlingly like pearls, it hides all this loveliness in the smutty depths of an old chimney. By what utilitarian principle of evolution have the habits of this bat-like bird been so modified that it has forsaken the sweet, pure air of the forest for a sooty home in the dwellings of man ? Is it for protection from the ravages of squirrels and owls ? But

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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every thrifty housewife wages war upon the swift, and I have known squirrels to penetrate even here. Cool evenings in June demand fires, and a fire below means death to the helpless fledglings in the nest above. To a layman it would seem that these artificial conditions offer greater danger than any forest foes could.

I believe no one has been able to watch the little gray builders at their work further than to see them carrying twigs of all shapes and sizes down into the chimney, but examination of a nest reveals the fact that the lower twigs are glued firmly in place with saliva one by one, and the others laid criss-cross upon them until the nest is shaped up and out like a bracket. It is a wonderful structure. Every piece seems to be cut at both ends to fill the position which it occupies, and varnished nicely as it is fastened into place. Just enough glue to make it secure is used, and none is ever spilled on the bricks. And so firm is it that pieces of brick may sometimes be broken off with it.



## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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Chemical analysis proves that this glue is only the saliva of the bird, not being obtained from the gum of any tree, and naturalists aver that after the nest is completed these saliva glands shrink into normal size again. It is the more remarkable when we remember that these little architects do not perch on trees or alight on the ground, and that each tiny twig must be broken from a tree as the bird passes it in flight.

In this exquisite cradle, with no lining of any sort, five small white eggs are laid. They are the most beautiful of all the eggs I have known. All this loveliness, which really cannot be described at all, is hidden where human eyes cannot enjoy it, and "Chimney swift" has become a term of dislike and contempt. If those neat house-keepers who ruthlessly order these dainty homes to be torn down were to see even one of them I am sure they would hesitate before destroying. The majority of nests are so placed against the south side of the chimney as to be shielded from the sun, but after the

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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young are hatched the mother protects them from the heat of noon by making her body a shelter over them. In about twelve days the pearly shells open, and birdlings like little hairless mice may be seen lying on the hard bed of varnished twigs. They are fed, I believe, by regurgitation, most frequently during early morning and late afternoon, the insects which constitute their food being caught on the wing and carried in the throat pouch. I have not seen them feed their young while flying in mid-air, but some witnesses aver that this is true.

So far as I have been able to judge, the young swifts develop slowly and do not leave the nest until three weeks old. I could never be quite sure that the young examined were the same individuals, not being able to climb to investigate and having to depend solely on the statements of others who brought them to me. They have tumbled down in all stages of growth, and funny enough they are with their long wings, tiny feet, and flat heads.

## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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I have, however, seen them rise from the chimney top in first flight with the adult birds, and, except for their size, there seemed to be little difference. With a strength and



swiftness of wing un-

surpassed by any other bird, the adults rise, circle, and soar for hours early in the morning and through the dusk of evening, entering and leaving the chimney in companies with a queer rotary motion. During the middle of the day they hang, bat-like, on the side of the wall supported by their claws and short spiny tail after the manner of woodpeckers on a tree trunk.

Eave-swallows present another curious instance of a change in the nesting-habits of

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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a species. Formerly these little masons were cliff-dwellers, and hung their adobe nests on the perpendicular surface of a cañon. But the advent of civilization offered them the advantage of homes under the protection of man, and like many of our "Little Brothers of the air" they readily accepted. Nowadays it is not uncommon to find from fifty to a hundred of these nests beneath the eaves of a country barn, and the farmers are superstitious about disturbing them. Probably the birds choose this location on account of the myriads of insects always to be found near a barnyard. The same colony returns year after year to occupy the old nesting-site and as many of the old nests as the winter has left intact. Often they find these pre-empted by the English sparrows, and then a battle royal ensues. In only one instance that has come under my observation have the sparrows been allowed to remain.

The colony of eave-swallows which I watched most closely was under the east and

## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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north eaves of two barns which stood at right angles to each other, forming two sides of the barnyard square. Here were some eighty-odd nests, and no two were alike. Some were retort-shaped, their funnel-like necks sticking out and down, with the doorway in the end; others were like a wall-pocket open at the top; but the greater number were formed like bowls set on edge, with the door in the middle where the bottom of the bowl would be. In one corner at the end of the barn, lack of space compelled crowding, and the houses there overlapped each other like gigantic wasp-nests, but every little home had its own front door. The mud was gathered on the edge of a small creek that ran within a hundred feet of the barn, and was sticky yellow clay. The swallows flew down to this in small companies, and there were always one or two on the way going or coming. Although we were curious to know how they obtained and carried the mud, a watch at the creek was most unsatisfactory. They

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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appeared to pick up as much as their mouths would hold, but whether they also filled their throats, as some aver, seemed doubtful to me. The only support I could find for this view was the shape and quantity of each pellet as seen in an old nest. Each one seemed to have a roundness and smoothness that would indicate a moulding in the throat. Also, some of the nests were so much harder and less crumbly than others, it would seem there might have been a difference in the saliva of the builders. The work of construction itself was most curious. Foundations were laid in as complete a circle as possible, and where no other nest or beam interfered the result was surprisingly perfect. On this foundation were placed the pellets of mud, like bricks on a wall but in ever narrowing circles, thus building out and up at the same time. Unlike the work of the robin or the wood thrush, the brick-laying of the swallows in every case observed was done from the outside, the bird spitting out the clay in a lump and patting it into place with his

## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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bill. No straw or hair or other material than clay was used in the walls of these nests. After they were completed and dry, a lining of feathers and fine grass was placed in them. In a few of the old nests housekeeping had already begun, and clutches of from four to seven white eggs marked with brown were found in each. Being obliged to leave that locality for a time, I could not watch the broods develop. Several weeks later a day was spent there photographing the young swallows, then about three weeks old.

The little mother is soft drab brown in color, and the babies look like her. One most devoted parent remained in the nest and let the Man with the Camera take her out before he could reach the little ones, and as soon as they were replaced on the nest she was there beside them again. In fact, at every eave-swallow's home examined that day the head of the mother bird was seen in the doorway. Blue jays and other feathered cannibals were about, and well they knew the result of leaving the young unguarded.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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The most dreaded of these enemies is the red-headed woodpecker. With diabolic cunning he knows when the young are newly hatched. Clinging to the boards as to a tree-trunk, a few strokes of his beak suffice to crumble the nest, and snatching one of the helpless fledglings, this murderer of infants flies away. The other little ones fall to the ground, but he never picks up one. No; he opens a fresh nest and sacrifices another brood to finish his meal, while the hapless babies on the ground fall victims to chickens or pigs.

The blue jay is, in this case, less destructive, for he enlarges the original doorway of the nest and helps himself to the contents without wantonly murdering more than he requires to satisfy his needs. To his shame be it known that a single "red-head" has destroyed six broods of eaveswallows in one afternoon, and doubtless as many more on other occasions when no watcher was present to report. And yet he is not listed among the bird ogres. Are



## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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eave-swallows his only victims? And if so, why?

On the inside of the barn were the cup-shaped nests of the barn-swallow. These are made quite differently, of alternate layers of mud pellets and hay. Were the farmers, so the legend goes, to allow one of them to be torn down, lightning would strike the barn,



Nest of barn-swallow

or the crops would fail and the storehouse remain empty. So, also, to cherish them brings good fortune, and windows for ventilation are never screened against their entrance. Once during a never-to-be-forgotten Summer spent on a farm, I lay on the hay all day and watched these little masons build. They came, male and female, bringing little pellets of mud in their bills

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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which they plastered to the boards, using their bills as trowels. Then straw or hay and horsehair were carried in long wisps, sometimes almost too heavy for the little architect, and made to stay in place with much poking and tucking down. Feathers were great prizes, and were stuck in promiscuously. Some naturalists assert that saliva is mixed with the mud to make it stick, and it seems to me this must be so. The nest is so much firmer than that of the eaves-swallow and can be taken down intact, while the other crumbles almost at a touch.

In several nests the young were nearly ready to fly, and their little heads were stretched over the edge, as if they were trying to gather up sufficient courage to make the dive. One did so after sitting half an hour half-way out, and he landed with admirable precision on a broad beam. Having rested a little and been fed, he followed his father through the window out into the free, fresh air. What a change for the little fellow from the hot close air of a hay loft to the

## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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clear, cool green and blue of the beautiful world! It was well worth risking a tumble for such freedom. And do any birds enjoy freedom as do the swallows? Circling in unrivalled flight, now in the sky, now close to earth, darting like shadows across the blue depths, skimming the lightest spray of a wave, soaring, diving, turning with marvelous swiftness in a wonderful game of "Follow the leader," they are the embodiment of joy.

At one point in the St. Joe River in Michigan, the bank of yellow sand rises precipitously to a height of fifty feet. Here is the home of thousands of bank-swallows, little holes in the earth so close together and so numerous that the surface looks as if it had been riddled by artillery. At the foot the black water swirls and eddies, and there is said to be no bottom, so deep is it. To reach the nests you must climb up, with the sand slipping beneath your feet at each step, and with stories of the people who have gone down and never come up flitting

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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through your memory. The task is a hard one, and it is also a useless one, for bank-swallows may be found in any place where there are sand-banks and water. But this colony is more or less famous on account of its numbers; and so it must be seen.

Of all the birds that I have watched, none have been so timid and so delicate as these same bank-swallows. In one nest that we opened were four fully fledged young who popped out like shot from a cannon at the first disturbance. One of them flew into my hand, and died almost instantly from fright. It has been suggested to me since that this may have been only a feint; but if so, it succeeded, for I thought him dead and mourned my cruelty for days. Never again have I attempted to catch a bank-swallow. The nests were rudely excavated tunnels about two feet long, and a little larger at the inner end. Here was placed a lining of grass and feathers, and here in one nest we found six small white eggs,

## CARPENTERS, MASONS, AND MINERS

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resembling those of the chimney-swallow but less transparent. In another, the newly hatched young were absolutely naked, and so tiny that they looked like a tangle of angleworms.

Unless you have watched these little miners when with fluttering wings they strike the first blow into the hard clayey bank, you will be puzzled as to how it is done. Feet and bill take an equal share, and but for the wings one might suppose a small gray mouse at work. The soil must be stiffer than light sand in order to prevent a "cave in," and instances are recorded of excavations made by bank-swallows in limestone. Those I have investigated have been in clay and gravelly soil, and even these offered a discouraging resistance to the delicate beak and claws. Watch from an ambush a colony of bank-swallows when the sun is shining full into each little home. A head appears at nearly every doorway. The babies are peeping out curiously at the big, bright, wonderful world. A step

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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overhead, or a sudden shadow as of a hawk across the sun, and, as by magic, the yellow bank presents only a row of empty black holes. All the babies are safe abed once more.







## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

Then from a neighboring thicket the wildest of singers,  
Swinging aloft on a willow spray that hung over the water,  
Shook from his little throat such floods of delirious music  
That the whole air and the woods and the waves seemed silent  
to listen. LONGFELLOW.

**O**NCE upon a time, long ago, a quaint  
old house stood in the midst of large  
grounds on the bank of a beautiful river.  
In front of it were lofty elms, whose branches  
interlaced and formed a perfect canopy. At  
the side grew syringa and weigelia bushes full  
of beauty in their season, while over the  
piazza masses of purple wistaria hung in  
graceful profusion. Back of the house an  
old-fashioned apple orchard offered the finest  
of playgrounds, for through it ran a small  
brook where little folks could fish with bear  
pins and never be drowned.

But dearest of all was the garden with its  
old-fashioned roses; its walks bordered with  
pansies, mignonette, and sweet alyssum; its



PLATE IX

*Nest and Eggs of Catbird in a bush*

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

Then from a neighboring thicket the wildest of singers,  
Swinging aloft on a willow spray that hung over the water,  
Shook from his little throat such floods of delirious music  
That the whole air and the woods and the waves seemed silent  
to listen. LONGFELLOW.

ONCE upon a time, long ago, a quaint old house stood in the midst of large grounds on the bank of a beautiful river. In front of it were lofty elms, whose branches interlaced and formed a perfect canopy. At the side grew syringa and weigelia bushes full of beauty in their season, while over the piazza masses of purple wistaria hung in graceful profusion. Back of the house an old-fashioned apple orchard offered the finest of playgrounds, for through it ran a small brook where little folks could fish with bent pins and never be drowned.

But dearest of all was the garden with its old-fashioned roses; its walks bordered with pansies, mignonette, and sweet alyssum; its

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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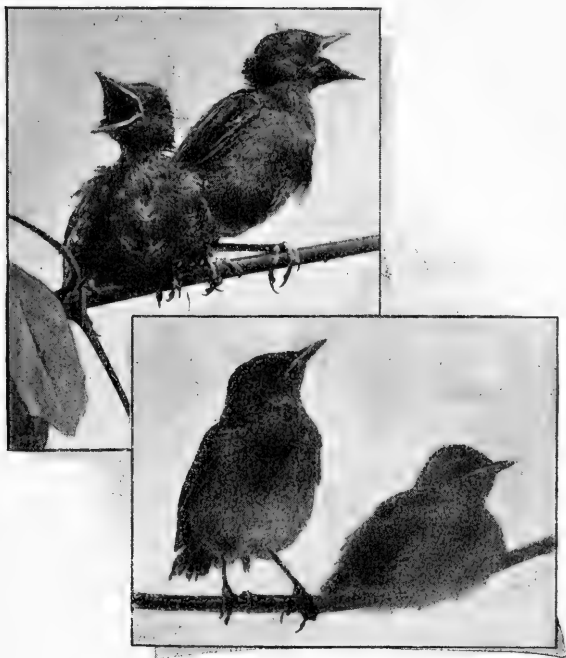
flaunting tulips and pure white lilies. Here were enacted those tragic comedies which form so large a part of a child's life. Here a small girl encountered two very dreadful experiences, her first angle-worm and her first bird-nest. Down in a far-away neglected corner of this delightful garden were some red-raspberry vines, and there a catbird had built her nest. And it happened one day that this little maid, eating her fill of raspberries, came upon it among the low branches.

Five funny little catbird babies filled it to overflowing. Five featherless necks surmounted by five terrible sightless heads wriggled and stretched in blind helplessness. Five big yellow mouths opened for food. Here was a chance! They were hungry. The little maid would feed them. Of course they liked raspberries; else why did they live right there in that bush? So she crammed them full of raspberries, and then a dreadful thing happened: they gasped, choked, shivered, and seemed to be dying. It was

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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too horrible, and bursting into tears, the small girl ran to the house and sobbed out the story in her mother's arms.



Upper, catbirds three weeks old. The same, two weeks later

Many a time since then has she found a nest of young catbirds and "jiggled" the edge to make them open their mouths, or,

if that failed, smacked her lips on the back of her hand to imitate the mother's chuck, which ruse is usually successful.

Have you ever studied a catbird? If not, do so at the first opportunity. You will find him in a tangle of wild grape-vine or a syringa bush or a willow thicket. You will hear him everywhere, for he is a ventriloquist, and from one small throat can send out a dozen different bird songs in as many directions. How often will he outwit you, and know it too! He will mock you, jeer at you, invite you to follow him, tease you with pretence of nest-guarding, and all with the grace of a Chesterfield. You will never learn his mood. Many a scramble through a brambly thicket, many a chase through fern tangles and wet places, will he lead you, ever farther and farther from his nest. And when you are sure you have finally reached his haunt, he will fly like a shadow back through the trees to the starting-place again. Should you discover his nest, how valiantly will he

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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defend it. Woe to your eyes if you venture to meddle. The bird so full of elegant grace in every movement becomes a screaming fury, bristling with rage. No soft note comes from his throat, but the hideous "meauw" that has given him his name.

He is a great dandy, and if you are an early riser, you may see him at his morning toilet. First, about four o'clock in the morning, comes a plunge in clean cold water of brook or pond. Such a splatter! Showers of pearly drops fly in every direction. A wofully bedraggled-looking bird flies out from it. Then each separate feather must be combed and dressed over and over again. It is a long process,—I have frequently seen it last half an hour, even without the sun-bath which follows it. After this he is ready for breakfast and song,—the very sweetest song of all the day, a joyous rhapsody on the sunshine and beauty of the glorious morning. The air is so still we hold our breath to listen, and listen and marvel.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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One catbird wooing that I watched was exceedingly funny, even though it involved some heart-burning. The male was a handsome fellow and very popular with the pretty ladies in gray. He was something of a flirt, I fear, for two of them followed him about for days, often quarrelling desperately for his favor. Finally, by some occult choice, one took precedence, and nest building was started. But the rejected sweetheart or divorcee would not be pacified, and as fast as material was carried to the chosen site she scratched it out and destroyed every vestige of the structure. How they finally settled matters I never knew; but the tormentor disappeared, and the now happy pair began a home in a wild-rose tangle, not more than four feet from the ground and so exposed that with a field-glass I could see most of the housekeeping. There was much consulting and trying one bush and another before this one was finally chosen. Then one day the builders came with a piece of newspaper which was placed in the



## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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notch, jumped on, and pulled about until it was in a satisfactory position. This was the first material I had seen them bring, but a few twigs may have preceded it, for many followed. Twigs, shreds of grapevine fibre, string, more paper, grass, and, last of all, fine hair-like rootlets were brought by male and female and woven into the nest by their turning round and round in it.

On the fourth day after the work was begun, a blue-green egg lay there, and each morning one more, until there were four. Then the sleek gray mother began her cares, resting quietly on the nest most of the day. Her mate sang in a thicket quite near, voicing in sweetest melody all the love and joy that a happy bird may feel, not so loud or so jubilant as during his bachelor days, but low and tender, like a whisper for her ears alone, all about the secret they two knew and what would happen some day in that little nest. If I went near she did not seem timid, but rather indignant at my intrusion. As long as I looked directly at her,

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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she sat still, but the instant I glanced away she was gone. So I troubled her as seldom as possible, wishing to study her natural family life, not one rendered strange by fear, and when the babies were out, I had my reward.

So far as I could see, they looked just like other young catbirds, but the parents saw a wide difference. The male often stood at the nest looking down upon them with undisguised admiration, thereby evoking an impatient chuck from the more practical mother bird. What she wanted for those little ones was food, not adulation; their mouths were open, some one must hunt, and for her part it was enough to have brought such wonderful creatures out of the shells. Yet she took her fair share of the labor, searching under the leaves and in the crotches for insects while her spouse brought caterpillars. It seemed to me there were fewer earthworms and more ants and spiders in the catbird menu than is usual with soft-billed birds. There were no ber-

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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ries near, and yet one day I saw the father bird fly home across the fields carrying a bright red raspberry in his beak. I was not there to see whether this was given to



A tilt between a bluebird and a catbird, each four weeks old

the mother or the nestlings, so do not know whether it forms part of an infant's diet. He carried it so that it looked like a red thimble on the end of his beak, and could be seen a long way off. After this I watched for signs of more berries at every catbird's nest, but found none.

In a hollow fence-post near the catbirds, a family of bluebirds were hatched at the same

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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time, and it was most interesting to notice how much more slowly the latter developed. When the catbird babies were fully dressed in pinfeathers, the down had scarcely begun to show on the bluebirds. Their eyes were three days later in opening, and the birds themselves were only half the size. Both families were very late, and were second, or possibly third, broods, as they were hatched July 10, long after the first bluebird brood had flown.

*À propos* of this, a pair of bluebirds had reared a brood in that same post in May, but I do not know whether it was this same pair or some other. It was presumably the same pair, for no one can say how many species choose the same nest year after year. We know phœbes and red-headed woodpeckers do so, and I have felt quite sure chimney swifts sometimes do.

When the little catbirds were ready to fly, there was a great commotion. An innocent-looking white kitten strolled by, to the consternation of the parents. One baby was

already out of the nest, in the grass, and another was balancing his funny fat body on uncertain little legs just at the edge, ready for flight. I ran to the rescue, and picked up the baby in the grass. He was ungrateful, as were also the father and mother. With all his little strength he fought to be free, and the furious onslaught of the mother bird made me wish I had a hat on. As soon as placed in the nest, he was out again, wildly fluttering back to danger. In the mean time the other baby had flown so recklessly that he could nowhere be found. There was nothing for it but to capture the kitten and carry her away. This, after some coaxing, she allowed me to do.

On returning to the catbirds, I found their troubles had increased, for a third had landed head downward in the rosebush where the thorns were thickest, and the branches one complete tangle. The bush was loath to give him up, but with hands, arms, and face scratched in the struggle, I finally extricated him, and placed him right

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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side up on a fence-post. By this time the father had collected his wits and his family, or at least the first two, and now brought food to the third baby. But he did not approve of a fence-post, and coaxed the youngster down into the fern tangle, where the other two were.

The babies left in the nest were demanding the entire attention of the mother, and would probably not have flown that day, but in a spirit of curiosity I "jiggled" the home the least little bit, and out they went. They were strong enough to fly, and I think both parents felt easier to have the family leave home together. An hour later they were sitting on the various branches of an elderberry bush, as quiet and well-behaved as young birds could be. They allowed me to catch them, and seemed bewildered with their newly acquired freedom.

The next lesson was to teach them to fly upward and land easily on a twig, and for some reason this was a difficult task. At first it was done by very short flights, — not

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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more than a foot or two, — and these were usually successful; but when longer ones were attempted, the result was quite often an ignominious tumble to the ground.

They soon learned to scold as the parents did, and to try funny little musical chuckles and gurgling notes, which reminded me of a rooster's first crow. One learned to sing quite a bit when six weeks old. Two of them remained in the immediate vicinity of their babyhood's home with the mother until they were nine weeks old and had nearly finished moulting. At this time, August 29th, the earth was parched with drouth, and the little creek had become a clay-baked path through the wood. In pity, as well as curiosity, I put a small glass dish filled with water in the catbirds' nook.

As soon as I had hidden, down they came for a bath. The older had grown quite a respectable tail, and his pride in it was ludicrous. Catching sight of it as it jerked excitedly up and down, he regarded it with the wide-eyed amazement of a human baby

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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discovering his hands. Meanwhile the tailless younger brother had jumped into the water and was splashing in great delight. Alas! among birds the best equipped de-



The same birds as in preceding cut, showing progress in feathering and relative growth

mands the right of way. Might is always right in the forest world, and the moment the older nestling discovered the usurpation of

his privileges he attacked the bather with savage pecks and shrill "meauws." The little fellow was plucky, and splashed on with undisturbed vigor. Finally, as if with deliberate intent to humiliate and insult, the tyrant seized the ragged brown feathers which hung limp where a dashing black tail should have been, and dragged the helpless fledgling out backward. This done, he proceeded to investigate the novel bathtub



## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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before getting into it. The glass gave out a clear tinkling sound when he pecked at it. Was it alive? He hopped backward with comical dismay, almost tumbling over in surprise and fright. Was it the sound, or a reflection in the water that startled him? Once more he tried it, very cautiously, and receiving no harm, played a merry tune on it, circling around it as he struck the edge with his beak.

Attracted by the noise, the half-dry youngster who had been driven off returned to join in the fun. This was not to be allowed for one moment! With an angry flirt of his funny little tail, Monsieur Mischief lit fairly in the middle of the tub and faced the intruder with defiant chucks. As the other darted away, he hopped out again, having made no attempt at bathing. This was repeated twice, until finally he too did some energetic splashing and retired to a sunny perch to dry. After twenty minutes spent in preening his dishevelled plumage, he was on the *qui vive* for fresh mischief.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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His inoffensive little brother sat contentedly on one foot taking a sun-bath, the other foot being tucked up among his feathers. No sooner had Monsieur Mischief spied this than he alighted close by, and after peeking under in great curiosity to see what had become of the missing foot, seized it and pulled it down into place. There was no audible protest at his interference, but the little foot was curled up again as soon as released. Again he seized it and again it was silently drawn up. At the third attempt patience ceased to be a virtue, and the little fellow, unable to defend himself, flew away. Doubtless the tormentor would have followed him but for a big dragon-fly which came soaring past and proved too alluring game.

It was while watching a brood of catbirds several years ago that I discovered a very interesting fact in bird economy. The excrements of the young are voided in tiny sacs, and are instantly carried away in the beak of the parent, who drops them during

## MONSIEUR MISCHIEF

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flight at a distance from the nest. Thus the home is kept neat, and no betraying débris falls upon the ground below.

An attachment for their old nesting-place is, I believe, characteristic of the catbirds, so often have I heard them complaining at any approach to their empty nests. This family was no exception, and long after the little ones were out they resented with loud protests any intrusion on their former nursery.

As they looked at me with eyes that questioned my intentions, and seemed to read my inmost thoughts, I became more and more impressed with their startling intelligence. Did they really divine my thoughts? How could they tell I coveted that well-made nest?

## A BROWN THRASHER

He sings each song twice over,  
Lest you should think he never could recapture  
That first fine careless rapture.

ROBERT BROWNING.

**T**HE brown thrasher, or “sandy mocking-bird” of Virginia, is one of the best loved but least understood birds of our northwestern avifauna. The term “thrush” so often applied to him does him an injustice, for no bird has greater individuality than he, or stands out more distinctly from the rest of the bird world when once you have come to know him. To be sure, he is the hero of the children’s rhyme, —

“There’s a merry brown thrush sitting up in the tree ;  
He’s singing to you, he’s singing to me,” —

but he really belongs to the mocking-bird and wren family, and has not a single characteristic in common with thrushes. His





## A BROWN THRASHER

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ever expressive tail — which, by the way, may have given him his name — would alone proclaim him first cousin to the wrens. Of slender, graceful form and rich brown color-



Nest of thrasher on the ground

ing, he is the aristocrat of the bird world, exclusive, elegant. Yet full of moods is he. Inquisitive as a blue jay, jolly as a blackbird, passionate as an oriole, gentle as a thrush, sad as a wood dove, who shall describe him or his song? He chooses the topmost bough of the tallest tree from which to enchant a listening world. "Look at me! Hear me sing! Here am I, way up high. I can sing, I can sing. Go away, go away, bird robber, bird robber." Or from a thicket you may hear him pour out

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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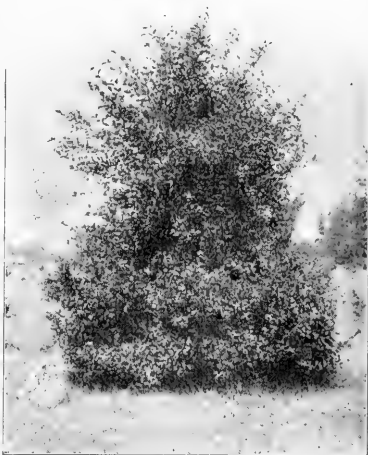
his heart in less rollicking melody, and interpret according to your fancy, but something he will say to you in spite of yourself. One that I watched at nesting-time would pause in his most brilliant medley to warn his mate of my approach. She was brooding on the nest a hundred feet away in a thorn-bush, and he kept one eye on her and the other on me. "Keep quiet, be quiet! Some one's near! Don't move! I'll watch; I can see! Look at me, look at me!" he would say in a ventriloquist's undertone. Then bursting out again with a shower of music, he would make me forget all else in listening to him. The nearer I approached the nest, the more enthusiastic became his song, until when within a few feet of it the mother flew off and he became suddenly silent. A moment later he was close at my side, with pleading, pathetic notes that said as plainly as any speech from human lips, "Go away, do! Go away, do!" always with the same accent and the same pause after "away" for greater empha-



## A BROWN THRASHER

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sis on the "do," which was delivered with a long downward inflection. Between these calls he voiced a protesting "chuck" in so gentle a tone that he only tempted me to stay and listen. Indeed, so exceedingly polite and gentlemanly was he that I at once decided this was a bird worth watching, for at the eight other thrashers' nests in that same field I had been greeted with harsh squawks by both parents.



Thorn-bush, the thrasher's favorite nesting-place

His nest was in the centre of a large thorn-bush that stood somewhat by itself in a lakeside meadow. It was a large, loosely made structure of twigs, yet lined with the greatest care with fine grasses

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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and rootlets. No paper or foreign substance was woven into it, as is usual with his cousin the catbird. Here there were five long, light-colored eggs, rounding at both ends, and thickly covered with fine chocolate specks. The ground rose gradually from the bush on the side away from the lake, and there under a spreading oak I watched the mother brood and heard the father sing day after day. Not long, however, for one morning the bush was deserted.

“ No bird song echoed down the hill,  
The tangled bank below was still.”

In the still small hours of the morning some enemy had devastated that pretty home, and only one egg, dropped in the scuffle, remained on the ground to tell the story. Nor am I ashamed to confess that tears of disappointment and of sympathy filled my eyes.

Resolved to ascertain if possible whether the father bird had fallen a victim also,

## A BROWN THRASHER

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I lingered in that vicinity all day. Just at twilight I heard him on the same tree-top as usual, and the next morning he was there again. To one who loves thrashers there could be no mistaking those mellow tones or that peculiar ventriloquistic song. No other thrasher has ever quite equalled it to my ears.

I knew he would build again somewhere, but days passed without my discovering where; and then, passing through a group of thorn-bushes several hundred feet from the site of the first nest, I heard the old, sweet, "Go away, do."

This was the sound I longed most to hear, for it told me that my thrasher had a home somewhere near, and that with patience I might find it. The first nest was four feet from the ground, but this one was down among the grasses and under a small thorn-bush. So well concealed was it that only the flight of the startled mother bird betrayed it to me. In it were five eggs of the thrasher and one of a cowbird. I

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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promptly took out the latter, and have been sorry ever since. Not that I have any liking for cowbirds, but removing it spoiled the interesting experiment of watching a young cowbird develop among a family of baby thrashers. I believe in this case he would have been worsted.

A few days after finding this nest we were surprised one fine morning to see every egg hatched and five naked, flesh-colored babies snugly tucked together there. An effort to lift one disturbed them all.

The mother was quite fearless when on the nest, and allowed us to come close to her. At my approach she flattened her body, and her eyes flashed anger as well as fear. If driven off, she alighted near, jerking her long tail in impotent rage. It is wonderful how many emotions are expressed by a bird's tail, especially if that bird belongs to the thrasher or wren family. If, however, she happened to be away when we called, she could not be induced to go back while we remained in the vicinity.

## A BROWN THRASHER

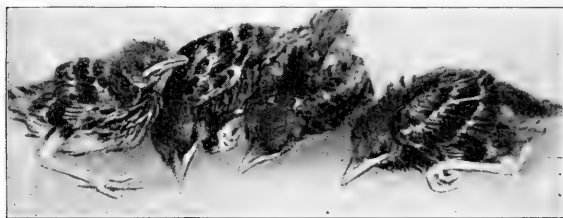
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The nests of brown thrasher babies are made of rougher material than those of more tender nestlings, possibly to give the baby feet a chance to grasp and stretch and the tender limbs to obtain strength. It was a funny sight to see those young thrashers raise themselves to their fullest height, and then stretch limb by limb and wing by wing. They were hearty, hungry youngsters, begging for food early and often. Both parents were kept busy bringing worms, beetles, grasshoppers, moths, and spiders. Everything went with them. I could not see that they evinced partiality for any especial menu. So long as it was brought every twenty minutes, and plenty of it, they were satisfied. I frequently saw the father hammer away at some kind of food on the limb of a tree. He would rise up to his fullest height, and strike down with his beak, pickaxe fashion, on the offending morsel, but I never discovered whether this was a hardshell beetle, or a nut, or what it was.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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He never failed to greet us with the same polite protest, and not once did I go there and find him off guard. Possibly his former sad experience had warned him of danger, for this family were reared in safety.



Baby thrashers, ten days old

When they were six days old, we photographed them, and again on the eighth day. Their wing and tail feathers were a soft red brown where they were out of the quills, and brown feathers covered head and back. The underparts were sparsely feathered in white, striped at the sides of the throat and spotted on the breast with brown, like the adult thrashers. Large yellow bills and very long yellowish legs gave them an overgrown appearance, like a schoolboy who has outstripped his clothes.

## A BROWN THRASHER

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Although these same legs seemed to be too weak for perching, nevertheless when we put them back into the nest the young birds with one accord refused to stay there and scampered in every direction. After many catchings and attempts to make them cuddle down in bed like well-behaved babies, we at last succeeded. But the next day they were off early and could nowhere be found. The father was still there, and from his anxiety I knew they were hidden in the vicinity, but every effort to discover their whereabouts failed. A week later we came upon one perched on a low branch of a thorn-bush only ten feet from his original nursery. How handsome he was with his clear white and brown breast and bright chestnut back, the yellow eye-ring giving him an appearance of great intelligence. Nor, with such a father, could this have been belied. He had grown quite a respectable stub of a tail, and could fly short distances. How I did want to take him home with me just long enough to

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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study him a little, and then release him in time for his Fall migration. But the laws of that State protect song-birds even from would-be naturalists, I am glad to say, and this interesting nestling was left with his doting parents.

These five youngsters were remarkably silent from the first, making no protest at being caught except by escaping as rapidly as possible. And during the weeks that followed their *début* into the free life of the wood, I never heard them utter more than a very low chirp when hungry. The entire family stayed within fifty yards of their birth-place for weeks, and the father never failed to request us to "Go away, do!" in his habitual polite manner.

After a time I heard him singing very early in the morning, and again just at sunset, but it was not his usual jubilant medley of nonsense. Family responsibilities were heavy upon him, and the dread of losing any one of those five wonderful young thrashers made him very wary. He slept each night



## A BROWN THRASHER

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in a thorn-bush, and certain am I that those nestlings were there also, though I never could find it in my heart to look.

It was a far cry from the large, loosely woven cradle of the thrashers to a tiny nest of a pair of hair-birds in the same thorn-bush. This was built in the centre of one of the turreted branches, and so securely hidden one would never suspect its presence. The wee mother had a dauntless courage, and more than once allowed me to touch her before she could be induced to leave the nest. She was a fluffy, fascinating bit of soft grayish-brown and buff, with sparkling bead-like

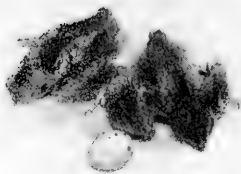


Hair-bird's nest in same  
thorn-bush

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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eyes that flashed indignant protest at my intrusion, and seemed to say as plainly as words, "If you were not so big, you would never dare be so rude to me."



Young hair-birds and undeveloped egg

The nest was an exquisite little affair of fine root-lets, woven into a perfect hemisphere and lined with hair. The inside rim measured only one and a quarter inches in diameter, and the outer not quite two inches. In it were three very tiny bluish-green eggs speckled with brown. Two of these hatched into the smallest and cunningest babies I have ever seen, unless it were those of the yellow warbler. They were so perfect, yet so *petite*. When they were six days old, the Man with the Camera essayed to photograph them, but so tiny were they we feared to injure them by making them

## A BROWN THRASHER

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perch, and no baby looks well lying flat on its face.

I wondered that the thrashers had not driven them away, but apparently the greatest harmony reigned between them, and the two families were reared together, one in the sky parlor and the other on the ground floor.

The little hair-birds, however, fell victims to some bird of prey as soon as they left the nest, and for days the desolate father and mother haunted the thorn-bush alone. Thus ended another of the many tragedies in birdland.

## CŒUR DE LION

“He would come blustering upon them, like a sudden wind among dead leaves, and drive them all apart.” — TENNYSON, *Idylls of the King*.

**A** DASHING, dauntless cavalier is this tyrant flycatcher, or kingbird; well-named, too, for he it is who makes life miserable for the crows, who drives all feathered intruders from his nest tree, and tolerates no interference with his domestic affairs. He it is who sits swinging on a barbed-wire fence or weed-stalk, and does not trouble himself to move as you stroll by.

His nest is usually built in an orchard, high in the branches of an old apple-tree, and woe to any bird who alights there. Red-headed woodpeckers, towhees, orioles, and cuckoos I have seen routed in one morning. An apple orchard is not the usual resort of towhees, but this pair were original. Hav-

ing raised their brood in the copse close by the deep wood, they speedily decided to continue the education of the little ones in the orchard, and each morning one might hear their silver song bells ringing from the apple-trees. There was a daily battle with the kingbirds, and a daily defeat long after the young flycatchers were grown up.

The only birds these "tyrants" would tolerate were a pair of orchard orioles who were there before them, and had hung a cosey nest of orchard grass from a limb on the south side of the tree. When the kingbirds came, the orioles protested, and for a few days war raged; but the orioles had eggs in their green cradle and would not be driven away. The tyrants, unwilling to acknowledge themselves conquered, decided to compromise, and built on the west side about five feet away. Unlike the trim basket of their neighbors, the nest of the kingbirds was a bird junk-shop. A bit of lace from the cap of a member of the farm household, a large piece of "swiss-ribbed" underwear, a

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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shoe string, a bit of calico, a gay ribbon, the flaxen wig of a small doll, horse hair, feathers, and rootlets combined to form its walls and lining. The feathers were mostly on the outside, woven in so as to wave wildly and add to its general air of rakishness. It was well suited in construction and appearance to the harum-scarum, devil-may-care occupants. When we looked in first, there were four white eggs with brown spots at the larger end, lying with points toward the centre after the manner of game-birds' eggs. The mother seemed to be seldom at home but always in some neighboring tree, whence she swooped down upon us with relentless fury. When the young were out of the shell, the anger of both parents increased at any approach to the nest. Fortunately for the poor orioles, their babies were hatched and gone before the young kingbirds made their *début*, or I fear even their courage would not have withstood the tyranny of the fly-catchers. The male stood daily upon a conspicuous perch with a chip upon his shoulder,

as it were, and dared any bird to fly near by. I now realized the cause of his hatred of the crows and jays. That wise little head well knew who were thieves and murderers of infants, and bravely he defended his home against all such.

To photograph the nest as it was in the tree was attended with so many difficulties as to be impracticable. An attempt to photograph the young birds later resulted in a battle



A tyrant fledgeling

with the parents during which the young took flight. The old birds would circle around and above the tree, swooping down and striking the hat of the Man with the Camera in a way quite startling. When a nestling flew out, the father followed him,

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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keeping just underneath him in a way that suggested catching him in case of a tumble. In this manner he escorted him to a place of safety, and returned to the contest just in time to assist another fluttering youngster to reach port. Meantime the mother was guarding two on a bush fully one hundred feet away. We had waited too long. Their flight was strong and self-reliant, and there was no hope of inducing them to pose. We were obliged to content ourselves with a fledgling from another nest found later in the Spring. This little fellow was the only one at home when we called for him, his older brother having taken flight at our approach. We coaxed him to sit still a minute, and then, having snapped the camera, we drove on. When we rode by two hours later, he was still posing in the same spot with a contentment indicative of wants well supplied, and we knew that his doting parents had not neglected him.



## A WOOD THRUSH

When birds sang out their mellow lay,  
And winds were soft and woods were green,  
And the song ceased not with the day.

LONGFELLOW.

CAN any one describe the song of a wood thrush? Poets and naturalists alike rave over it, and even for non-bird-lovers it has a strange fascination. Heard in the soft fading light of early evening, it is most beautiful. Then the more noisy songsters who have made the long summer day radiant with their music are quiet, and slowly, without hurry, each clear note perfect as a pearl, the thrush chants its evening hymn. It falls like a benediction upon the silent forest, "O fair! O sweet! O holy!"

The bird himself is no less fascinating than his song. Of a beautiful soft brown plumage with snowy breastspotted like a leopard's skin, and large liquid eyes that look at you with

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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both trust and fear, he draws the bird student with irresistible bands of love. His



A nest of mud and grasses

gentleness appeals to one's chivalry; his faith makes protection obligatory. Surprising lack of concealment in the choice of a nesting-site renders the study of the thrush's home life comparatively easy. He is called "shy" and "timid," but those I have watched have been confident and friendly to an astonishing degree. I have gone quite up to

the nest, talking soothingly all the time to the little brown mother, and she remained perfectly quiet. A sudden move-

## A WOOD THRUSH

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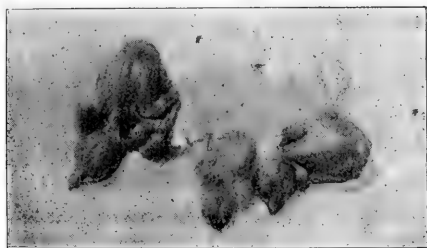
ment would cause her to rise quickly and stand motionless on the nest, watching me with eyes full of dread, and when this occurred I took myself away as speedily as possible. Cruel indeed would it be to torture that gentle mother-heart unnecessarily.

This summer, on a horizontal branch of a spreading apple-tree in a neighbor's orchard, a pair of these thrushes placed their nest of mud and grasses. It was not more than seven feet from the ground and quite exposed to view. When we found it, sitting had begun, and the little brown mother brooded impartially upon her own blue eggs and the speckled egg of a cowbird that lay with them. Usually we removed the cowbird's egg wherever found, but in this case curiosity prompted us to leave it. It was later in developing than the others, and the young thrushes were four days old when their ugly foster brother broke his shell. The contrast between them was very interesting. The thrush babies were pink, plump, and naked,

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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while the young cowbird was covered with a fuzzy white down-like cotton, and had the hollow back of a cuckoo. When only a day old he tried to boost the others out of the nest, or at least persisted in putting his



Young wood thrushes and cowbird

head down, raising his back and “hitching” backward with a funny motion which would shove any bird of his size out of the nest. Fortunately the thrushes, being older, were larger, and as there were but two, the three nestlings managed to stay in the cradle together. I fancied the parent thrushes looked askance at the queer baby, but they fed him without audible protest, and never told whether they admired or disliked him. We photographed the fledgelings when the cow-

## A WOOD THRUSH

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bird was two days old, expecting to continue our observations later on, but every one of them fell a victim to a crow, and the little adobe house was left empty.

Two weeks later this same pair of thrushes built in a low crotch of a sapling about four feet from the ground. The nest was not shielded in any way. No leaves hung over it, no vines covered it. It was a target for the gaze of all passers-by. Yet there the fearless mother sat day after day, looking out with calm eyes that seemed to read our love and to trust to our protection. She allowed the Man with the Camera to come within two feet of her, but when he attempted to set up that black box on three shiny legs, it was too much for even her quiet spirit. Away she flew, and refused to return so long as the camera remained in sight. Knowing her misfortune with the first brood, we hesitated about bothering her while rearing this one. The four blue eggs hatched, one each day, until four pink babies filled the little nest. After this, no mother ever led a

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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busier life than she. With no aid, as we thought, from the male bird, she fed and guarded the little ones. The tree stood near a small slough, and there she found food in plenty without much hunting; but the nervous strain was very great on her, and she began to be ragged-looking and fidgety. I wondered where the father might be, for after the brood hatched we never heard his song or saw more than one parent (presumably the mother) near the nest at a time. Had he fallen a victim to cat, owl, or small boy? However that may be, the small brown mother bore her part bravely and reared her family well. It rained hard one night, and early the next morning I went out to see the tiny thrushes. There sat the largest on the edge of the nest, preening his feathers just as he had seen his mother do. I startled him by spattering him with raindrops from the leaves, and out he fluttered to a twig three feet away. This relieved the pressure at home, and immediately three little heads were raised and six

## A WOOD THRUSH

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small brown wings flapped vigorously. One, stronger than the others, climbed upon the back of a brother and stretched up to his fullest height. He was a wise-looking baby, but gentle, as are all the wood thrushes. When I attempted to capture him, he too took flight. The other two remained in the nest until evening, but at dusk all had flown. For several days we were on the lookout for a solitary thrush with four fledglings in the wood, and after a week I fancied we saw them in the bushes near the slough, about one hundred yards from their old nest. The mother was very busy and very silent, as became a widow with four little ones to care for. How we longed to help her, only those who like to manage other people's babies can understand.

## YELLOW WARBLER

Thy duty, wingèd flame of Spring,  
Is but to love and fly and sing.

LOWELL.

**A**MONG the tangled wild-blackberry vines that grew on the edge of the deep wood, a pair of yellow warblers made their pretty home. When I discovered it, there was just a bit of silver fibre all matted together and laid loosely in the parting of the branches. Early in the morning and late in the afternoon I watched it grow hour by hour, for during the middle of the day the little workers rested in the cool depth of the wood. Both brought strips of the outer skin of the same silvery weed that the orioles use in their dainty cradles, and scratched it into the required fineness in much the same way, with feet and bill. They were nervous, fidgety little house-keepers, entirely absorbed in their work, and so oblivious of my presence that one of







## YELLOW WARBLER

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them alighted on my shoulder by mistake in her hurry to reach the nest over which I was bending. She was surprised but not alarmed, and flew at once to her work when I withdrew.

As in the case of all birds' nests, the material brought was shaped to suit by a turning or wriggling of the little mother round and round in the chosen spot, tucking ragged ends in, scratching other places out, until it felt comfortable and looked smooth.

Even with these wee builders there is much individuality, some of their nests being round and trim with a nicely moulded edge, others simply twisted together and fastened so loosely that the least spreading of the branches by the wind causes them to tip over. One little nest that we found in a small broad-leaved sapling had two of the leaves fastened down over it in the weaving so as to form a complete shelter and protection from the wind. The little mother flew in at the side, and sat with her head toward the opening, perfectly concealed from curious eyes, yet having full view of all her neighbors' doings.

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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The little pair in the blackberries, however, took no such precautions. They were typical yellow-bird architects, and their home was built with an eye to sunshine and fresh air, and recklessly exposed to the gaze of every passer-by. The outside being complete, they brought silk from the pussy-wil- lows, padding it inside thickly and smoothly up to the rim.

Alas! that wretched parasite among birds, the cowbird, found the pretty home and made it a cradle for one of her own ugly eggs. When this was discovered, there was great consternation in the warbler family for an hour or so. Then patiently, choosing the lesser of two evils, the little builders carefully constructed a second story on top of the first, leaving the intruder walled into the cellar. Scarcely was the structure completed and one tiny blue egg laid, when the same catastrophe overtook it. This was too much, and I expected them to desert and build elsewhere, but with more than human perseverance they formed a third nest, even

## YELLOW WARBLER

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more dainty in proportion and workmanship, on top of the other two, making it look like a little gray tower.

When the tiny bluish eggs were laid on the white satin lining, the whole formed an exquisite picture framed in the dark green leaves and red brown branches.

Up to this time there had been much chattering and many happy snatches of song, as the builders worked and wooed. Sometimes the master of the small household, as if overcome with the beauty and joy of it all, would drop the mouthful of material he was bringing and sing with all his might, then fall to kissing his little spouse, telling her how sweet she was and how happy he was and all the rest of it. But now a sudden silence fell upon the blackberry vines. A secret too precious to be told was going on, and he sang in a tree a little farther away, where she could see and hear but would not be betrayed. When not bringing her food or taking a necessary meal himself, he was ever at his post. When she left the nest, he

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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stood guard near but not on it, often going down to it to look and admire if he thought no one could see. In exactly thirteen days I knew, by his absence from his usual post and his new anxiety with regard to my visit, that the first little one was hatched. For almost the first time he scolded me, because now there was something so beautiful and wonderful in that tiny nest, he was sure I would want it for my own. And truly there was something beautiful and wonderful, though only infinitesimal bits of naked birdlings. Every part of the little bodies was perfect in proportion; even the small heads were round and pretty, at least to one who loves bird-babies. They were the smallest nestlings I have seen except those of the humming-bird.

At the end of a week they had pin feathers on wings and tail and down on head and back. In another week the feathers were fairly out, and the wee birds were the prettiest things in the wood. They climbed up on the edge of the nest and looked out into the

## YELLOW WARBLER

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great green forest world with innocent baby eyes, not a whit afraid of the danger that lurked in every bush. I feared for them, because I knew that those blackberry vines



Wee yellow warbler nestlings

were the haunt of snakes which had destroyed more than one brood I had been watching. The parents feared also, and came busily with food as if to coax them to be contented at home until their wings were stronger.

At length one day, not quite three weeks from the time they first broke the pretty shells, I was startled to see the mother bird fly out to meet me and fall fluttering to the ground. I stooped to follow and pick her up, but she fluttered into weeds across the road. Sure that she was wounded, I again

## NESTLINGS OF FOREST AND MARSH

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tried to catch her, but after having led me twenty feet from the nest, she flew up into the tree as well as ever. This is the only time I have seen a warbler try the trick practised by some of the larger birds, and I could scarcely believe my eyes. Even then I was at a loss to know why, because she had made so little protest on my other visits to her nursery. But when I reached the nest, with a flutter and rush out flew one of the nestlings who had sat in the valley of decision too long, and search revealed the other two sitting on separate twigs, solemn as young owls, with no attempt to escape. They let me pick them up, and posed beautifully for their portraits. After that one of them sat in unwinking silence on the branch where we placed him for six long hours, while his fond papa from time to time brought him flies, small green worms, and spiders. The other two were more restless, and disappeared with their mother among the dense foliage. That night at least three of the family, including the father, slept in a



## YELLOW WARBLER

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hazel-bush close by the old blackberry vines, until a vigorous shaking of the branches disturbed them.

It is really almost as profitable to prowl through the clearings by moonlight as in the daytime, if one is sufficiently familiar with birds to recognize species by their size, form, and flight; for up from the ferns, out of the bushes, and sometimes from the top of fence-posts, one may flush these little sleepers and discover where they spend their nights.





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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, JOHN WILSON  
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Nestlings of forest and marsh,