

ORNITHOLOGY

Bird Photography

Birds, as you know, are shy creatures and seem to have a pet aversion to being photographed. You must have some method to lure them to your camera. There are three things that you can play upon—hunger, thirst and love of the nest and young.

The first can be used only in the winter, when food is scarce. Put out a bird lunch-counter, a board fastened to a tree is probably the best, and on this put grain, nutmeats, suet, raisins and pieces of bread.

In the first winter of my enthusiasm for birds I concocted the idea of running a lunch counter on a little pulley from my bedroom window to a nearby tree. The wire on which the lunch counter ran slanted downward and I pulled the counter back with a string. Each day I pulled the counter a little closer to the window, so that at the end of two weeks I had chickadees and nuthatches eating off the window sill.

Finally, I decided that it was time I started photographing these birds. One Saturday, as a result of almost a whole day's waiting, I made one really good picture of a chickadee at the lunch counter. It was my first bird photograph. I had it enlarged, I showed it to everyone, I gazed at it day in and day out until it was almost worn out. Even today I cannot look at it without a little thrill of pleasure at the memory of my joy over this first achievement.

When spring came I put out a bird bath, and along in May, when the weather got hot, it had many visitors. One day I focused my camera on it and waited inside the house, ready to pull the string which released the

shutter. A catbird glided furtively near, then perched on the edge of the bird bath and drank. When I snapped the picture he jumped at least three feet in the air and refused to come near again for days afterward. A pair of goldfinches came and I photographed them; and later in the afternoon the shy and elusive woodthrush drew close and finally came to drink. It was a thrilling day, and my pictures turned out surprisingly well.

Now I come to photographing birds at the nest. In this you will get on more intimate terms with birds than in any other way and also you will gain some knowledge of their home life. It is enchanting work, although it requires patience.

First, of course, you must locate the nests, and this you soon become adept at doing. When a bird starts nervously scolding you for any length of time or if one stands about holding food in its beak, you can be pretty sure that a nest is nearby. It is well to know where the different birds build their nests, so as not to look for the nest of a tree-building bird on the ground or vice versa. After the nest is discovered, you set up your camera, attach a string to the shutter and wait a short distance away, ready to pull the string (thus releasing the shutter) when one of the parent birds comes to the nest. In this you must make as little disturbance as possible, for there is always the danger of causing the parent birds to desert the nest. Make slow, noiseless movements, break away as few branches as possible (it is better to tie them back), make yourself and the camera as inconspicuous as you can. You will find that it is much easier to get pictures when the eggs have hatched and the young are in the nest.

The vireo are very tame, but their nests are difficult to find. Some children found a vireo nest for me in a lilac bush. The tiny mother bird was absolutely indifferent to the camera. However, now and then she cocked her exquisite little head on one side and rasped out a few scolding notes.

Taking a scissor-tail's picture caused me a good deal of perspiring effort. I found the nest in a lone catalpa tree on the prairie, and for four consecutive scorchingly hot July days, I lay waiting for the scissor-tail to condescend to be photographed. On the fourth day I climbed up and down the catalpa tree fourteen times and snapped the camera twelve times, all of which resulted in two really good pictures and a goodly number of freckles on the photographer's nose.

A red-headed woodpecker, after

shrieking and yelling his very unfavorable opinion of me for at least two hours, finally gave up in disgust and allowed himself to be photographed.

Interesting photographs can be made of the nests themselves. Ground nests containing eggs make charming pictures, but these are difficult to find—you come upon them usually by accident. One time when walking in a field, a bird darted up from between my feet and on stooping down I found the nest of a lark sparrow. I set my camera on a tripod, took a time exposure and then hurried away, so that the mother bird would return and the eggs would not become chilled.

Then you can make pictures of the young birds after leaving the nest. In late May I found a family of baby chickadees just after breaking home ties. There were six of them to start out with, but I photographed only two. Posing even a couple of self-willed baby birds is a difficult proposition—just try it.

—LORENE SQUIRE,
Camp Fire Girls.

Science News-Letter, July 9, 1927

Nature Coordination

Realizing the need for a national program that would coordinate the nature activities of national groups working with young people, the American Museum of Natural History invited these volunteer organizations to form a council to be known as the Coordinating Council on Nature Activities for the purpose of teaching the growing generation, through nature activities, the value of all wild life and natural resources and their conservation.

The various organizations represented are as follows:

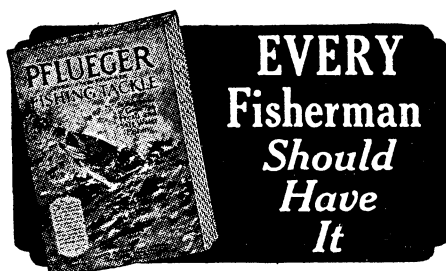
American Museum of Natural History, American Natural Study Society, Boy Scouts of America, Camp Directors Association, Camp Fire Girls, Inc., Girl Scouts, Inc., Pioneer Youth of America, Playground and Recreation Association, Woodcraft League of America.

Science News-Letter, July 9, 1927

Two small islands in the Pacific have been made bird reservations by an executive order.

The troublesome barberry which spreads black stem rust to grain fields was once valued because of the medicinal uses of its roots.

German police are using a specially equipped automobile to rush materials needed for investigation and first aid to the scene of a crime.



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