

CHICKADEE.

You perhaps know the bush-tit is the cousin of the chickadee, so no wonder he is confiding.

The glade up Fulton creek just suited the chickadees, ^{as well as the bush-tits.} I stood one day on the bank of the stream watching one of these little black-capped birds. He fidgeted about as if he had put something away and couldn't remember just where he laid it. Then he began twisting and turning. He hung by his toes head down, and swung back up like a trapeze performer. He turned head down again, dropped and lit right side up on the branch below. I looked around, but saw nothing except the old wreck of an alder; dead, rotten, useless, broken off five feet from the ground; not even good for fire wood; worm-eaten at the bottom, yes, rotten, but not entirely useless, for in a few minutes I saw the chickadee whirl over to the old stump and pause for a moment before a tiny round hole.

Two days later we visited the nest and happened to catch both the owners away from home. Opening a small back door into the house we got a picture of the seven dotted eggs. Then we carefully slid the door back and locked it with a string, and a few minutes later saw the mother pop into the front door to continue her brooding.

What if every egg should hatch I thought. What could any mother and father do with seven children all the same age? Think of it! Two pair of twins and a set of triplets, and not one of the youngsters able to assist in caring for brother or sister.

Seven eggs did hatch

I spent two whole days at the nest before the young chicks were ready to leave home. The owners of the stump seemed

①
Bird at dawn
eggs ②

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to think we had placed the camera there for their convenience, for they generally used the tripod for a perch. Then they always paused a second at the threshold before entering. The seven eggs had prettly well filled the nest. Now, it looked like an overflow. It seemed to me if the little chicks continued to grow they would either have to be stacked up in tiers or lodged in an upper story.

5 * The day was warm. we built a little promenade from the front door, and set one of the youngsters blinking in the sunshine. (He soon got his bearings.) Then we set out another and another, seven in all. It looked like a public dressing room. Think of being crowded in the tiny hole of a hollowed, punky stump with six brothers and sisters. Jammed together with your clothes all crushed in wrinkles, not even room to stretch out, let alone comb and dress yourself properly.

6 * I have watched old birds feeding the young, but I never had a good idea of just the amount of insect food they did consume until I watched the chickadees for a few days after the eggs hatched. Both birds fed in turn, and the turns were anywhere from three to ten minutes apart. From the time the callow chicks were born, the parents were busy from daylight to dark. They ate such numbers of spiders, green caterpillars, brown worms, grass-hoppers, daddy-long-legs, moths, millers and flies, besides untold numbers of eggs and larvae. Everything was grist that went to the chickadee mill. The way they could turn

insects into feathers, distributing black and white pigments just where they belonged, was simply marvelous. A baby chickadee changes about as much in a day as a human baby does in a year.

One chickadee nest in an orchard means the destruction of hundreds and maybe thousands of harmful insects and worms every day. It more than pays for all the fruit the birds can destroy in half a dozen seasons. But there are generally other birds nesting about. Think of the time when a whole flock of seven young chickadees are turned loose to search among the trees day after day during the entire year.

I believe there's more family love in a chickadee household than any bird home I've visited. (I've seen a young flicker jab at his brother in real devilish madness, but I never saw two chickadees come to blows.) Of course, when young chickadees are hungry they will cry for food just as any child. Not one of the seven was the least backward in asserting his rights when a morsel of food was in sight. (This shows the mother clinging to the side of the tree just about to feed the third chick from the end. But you will note the apparently satisfied expression of the chicks on the end.) The next time the mother came I saw what really looked like a family jar. Each one of the seven was clamoring for food as the mother hovered over. She must have forgotten whose turn it was, for she hung beneath the perch a moment as if thinking. How she ever told one from the other so as to divide the meals evenly, I don't know. There was only one chick I could recognize, that was pigeon-toed, tousled-headed Johnnie on the end.

* Family jar *

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We trudged up the canon early the next morning. Four of the flock had left the nest, and taken to the bushes. Three stayed at the stump, while we focused the camera. It is rare indeed, when one catches a real clear photograph of bird home-life, such as the mother just placing a green cutworm in the mouth of a hungry chick; an unusual look of satisfaction on the face of the second bantling, who had just gotten a morsel; and a hopeful expression on the countenance of the third, who is sure to get the next mouthful; the present, the past and the future in one scene.

Half a mile up stream from the Chisbadee homestead is the old ~~mill~~ dam on Fulton Creek.