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WARBLER WAYS.

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During the warm days of June when the mystery of life seems suddenly unveiled in a miraculous manner, I often frequent a woody retreat above the old mill-dam on Fulton Creek. The water gurgles among the gray rocks and glides past a clump of firs and maples. Star flowers gleam from the darker places of shade, white anemones are scattered in the green of the grass blades and ferns and Linnaean bells overhang the moss-covered logs.

As one sits here in the midst of the woods, the chords of every sense are stretched. His nostrils sniff the aroma of the fir boughs tipped with their new growth of lighter green. His eye catches the cautious movements of furry and feathered creatures. His heart vibrates with the rhythmic throbbing of the forest pulse.

One day as I lay idling in ^{one of my favorite canon haunts} (this favorite haunt,) a shadow caught in the net of sunbeams spread under the maple. A black-throated gray warbler fidgeted on the limb above with a straw in her bill. This was pleasing. I had searched the locality for years, trying to find the home of this shy bird, and here was a conclusive piece of evidence thrust squarely in my face.

The site of the nest was twelve feet from the ground in the top of a sapling. A week and a half later, I parted the branches and found a cup of grasses, feather-lines, nestled in the fork of the fir. There lay four eggs of a pinkish tinge, touched with dots of brown.

The chief source of satisfaction

The chief source of satisfaction in a camera study of bird life comes not in the odd-time chances of observation, but in a continued period of leisure, when one may spend his entire time about bird homes just as he takes a week's vacation at the sea-shore. One cannot take a camera, no matter how expensive it is, and snap off good bird pictures during the spare moments of a busy day. He might, however, fill half a dozen note-books with valuable odd-time observations. To be sure, the joy of nature comes to the amateur, not to the professional but to be a successful amateur bird photographer one has fairly to make a business of lying in wait for his subjects hour after hour, day by day, and maybe week after week. The reward of real success comes not in mere acquaintanceship with some feathered bit of flying life, but in real friendship; there cannot be the formality of a society call, but one should, by frequent visits, be well enough acquainted to drop in at any time with his camera, without interfering with the daily affairs of family life.

The real value of photography is that it records the truth. The person who photographs birds successfully, has to study his subjects long and carefully. He is not likely, therefore, to get but a scanty set of notes and be compelled to complete his observations when he is seated in the comfortable chair of his study. Of course, in the study of art, we may try to improve on Nature, but in Nature Study, truth is the

important element. We might as well understand that a beast or bird is interesting because of its own wild individuality, not because it is a man dressed in fur or feathers.

Of course it showed a pure lack of discretion to try to picture the home of such a shy warbler during the days of incubation, but I half believe the feathered owners would have overlooked this, had it not been for the pair of blue jays that buccaneered that patch of fir. While we were getting a picture, I saw them eyeing us curiously, but they slunk away among the dark firs squawking jay-talk about something, I didn't understand. Two days later we skirted the clump to see if the sense of warbler propriety had been too severely shocked by the camera. In an instant I translated every syllable of what that pair of blue pirates had squawked. The scattered remnants of the nest and the broken bits of shell told all.

These gray warblers, however much they were upset by the camera-fiend and blue jay depredations, were not to be thwarted. They actually went to housekeeping again within forty yards of the old home site. The new nest was placed in a fir sapling very like the first, but better hidden from marauding blue jays. It was supremely better located from the photographer's point of view. Just at the side of the new site was the sawed-off stump of an old fir upon which we climbed and aimed the camera straight into the nest. There, instead of four, were only two small nestlings. They stretched their

skinny necks and opened wide their yellow-lined mouths in an attitude of unmistakable hunger.

The moment the mother returned and found us so dangerously near her brood, she was scared almost out of her senses. She fell from the top of the tree in a fluttering fit. She caught quivering on the limb a foot from my hand. Involuntarily I reached to help her. Poor thing! She couldn't hold on, but slipped through the branches and clutched my shoe. I never saw such an exaggerated case of the chills, or heard such a pitiful high-pitched note of pain. I stooped to see what ailed her. What, both wings broken and unable to hold with her claws! She wavered like an autumn leaf to the ground. I leaped down, but she had limped under a bush and suddenly got well. Of course, I knew she was tricking me.

The next day my heart was hardened against all her alluring wiles and crocodile tears. She played her best, but the minute she failed to win, I got a furious berating. It was no begging note now. She perched over my head and called me every name in the warbler vocabulary. Then she saw that we were actually shoving that cycloplan monster right at her children. "Fly! Fly for your lives!" she screamed in desperation. Both the scanty-feathered, bob-tailed youngsters jumped blindly out of the nest into the bushes below. The mother outdid all previous performances. She simply doubled and twisted in agonized death spasms. But, not to be fooled, I kept an eye on one

nestling and soon replaced him in the nest where he belonged. Nature always hides such creatures by the simple wave of her wand. I've seen a flock of half a dozen grouse flutter up into a fir and disappear to my eyes as mysteriously as fog in the sunshine.

This fidgety bit of featherhood is called the Black-throated Gray Warbler, but it's only the male that has a black throat. He is not the whole species. His wife wears a white cravat and she, to my thinking, is a deal more important in warbler affairs. Mr. Warbler seemed unavoidably detained away from home on matters of business or social importance the greater part of the day when the children were crying for food.

The first day I really met the gentleman face to face we were trying to get a photograph of the mother as she came home to feed. She had gotten quite used to the camera. We had it leveled point-blank at the nest, only a yard distant. A gray figure came flitting over the tree-top and planted himself on the limb right beside his home. He carried a green cut-worm in his mouth. No sooner had he squatted on his accustomed perch, than he caught sight of the cyclops camera. With an astonished chirp, he dropped his worm, turned a back somersault, and all I saw was a meteor streak of gray curving up over the pointed firs. I doubt if he lit or felt any degree of safety till he reached the opposite bank of the river.

We met his lordship again the following day. The

mother was doing her best to lure us from the nest by her deceiving antics. Every visit we had made, she kept practising the same old trick. Just as she was putting on a few extra agonized touches, I suddenly saw a glint of gray. The father darted at the feigning mother. I never saw such a case of wife beating. Maybe it was justifiable. I'm not an expert on bird ethics, but I know I'd never stand idly by and see such a scandalous performance among my neighbors. I don't know whether the pater familias blamed his spouse for my presence and interference, or whether he wanted all her time and attention devoted to the care of the children. She didn't practice deceit any more.

I could not tell one nestling from the other. As I sat watching the mother, the questions often arose in my mind: Does she recognize one child from the other? Does she feed them in turn, or does she poke the food down the first open mouth she sees? Here is a good chance to experiment, I thought. So with a good supply of 5 x 7 plates, we watched and photographed from early in the morning till late in the afternoon for three days. At the end of that time, we had eight pictures, or rather four pairs, each of which was taken in the same order as the mother fed her young.

The warblers foraged the firs for insects of all sizes and colors. The mother often brought in green cut-worms, which she rolled through her bill as a house-wife runs washing

through a wringer, perhaps to kill the creature or to be sure it was soft and billsome. This looked like wasted energy to me. The digestive organs of those bob-tailed bantlings seemed equal to almost any insect I had ever seen.

In the days I spent about the nest, I never saw the time when both the bairns were not in a starving mood, regardless of the amount of dinner they had just swallowed. The flutter of wings touched the button that seemed automatically to open their mouths. At the slightest sound, I've often seen disputes arise while the mother was away. "I'll take the next" said one. "I guess you'll not!" screamed the other. The mother paid no more attention to their quarrels and entreaties than to the ceaseless gurgle of the water. How could she? I don't believe she ever caught sight of her children when their mouths were not open. The fact that the mother fed them impartially appealed in no way to their sense of justice. The one that got the meal quivered his wings in ecstasy, while the other always protested at the top of his voice.

The first pair of pictures in the series was taken while the young were still in the nest. The mother fed the nearest nestling. Changing the plate and adjusting the camera again, I had to wait only three minutes. The bairn at the edge of the nest surely had the advantage of position, but what was position? For all his begging, the nearest got a knock on the ear that sent him bawling, while his brother gulped down a fat

spider.

Soon after, one of the bantlings hopped out on the limb and the gray mother rewarded him with a mouthful that fairly made his eyes bulge. On her return, she did not forget the hungry, more timid fledgling in the nest.

Again I tried the same experiment of having the momentary light between her clammoring children. First the right one received a toothsome morsel, notwithstanding the impatient exclamations of the chick on the left. Soon after, the hungry bairn on the left got a juicy bite, in spite of the vociferous appeals from the right.

"This way I'll baffle the ingenuity of the mother," I thought, as I perched both bantlings on a small limb where they could be fed only from the right. This looked good to the first little chick, for he seemed to reason that when he opened mouth wide, his mother could not resist his pleadings. He reasoned rightly, the first time. On the second appearance of his mother, position did not count for much: it was his brother turn.

Later in the day, I watched the gray warbler coax her two children from the fir into the thick protecting bushes below. With the keen sense of bird motherhood, she led them on and they followed out into the world of bird experience.