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PHOTOGRAPHING FLICKERS.

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Sycamores

If I were the owner of the ^(firs) ~~about~~ the reed-cov-
 ered pond and were drawing rental from the bird tenants, I'd ra-
 rather take a lease from the Flickers ^{a woodpecker} than any other feathered
 family. They're not always ^{moving away} ~~a-moving~~ south and leaving your
 trees without an occupant as soon as the ^{Summer is over.} ~~first frost nips~~.
 When the ^{rain comes} (thermometer drops low) and the kinglets are twittering
 too softly to be heard more than a few yards away, "High-hole"
 always sends a full share of bird cheer up and down the scat-
 tering woods. Nor is he half as particular as some of the
 other bird residents. He takes the best of the few remaining
 stumps and seems satisfied. Once he pounded out a wooden home
 just below his last year's house. His wife didn't like it very
 much, but they settled it in some way and reared a thriving
 family.

OUT

One January day, I was wading through the wet grass
 and low bushes near Ladd's ^{Pond} farm, when a flicker flapped up al-
 most in my face. His mate followed. I found several holes
 where they had been driving into the ground for food. The bug
 supply under the bark was low, or, maybe it was purely a vol-
 untary change of diet.

"Red-hammer" of the West, like "Yellow-hammer", his
 eastern cousin, is a rather odd mixture of woodpecker and robin
 The Picus family in general takes its food from the bark of a
 tree, but Red-hammer often ^{digs his food from the ground} ~~(feeds on berries, grain and earth-~~
 worms. According to woodpecker taste, a bird should cling to

add

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the side of a tree, clutching two toes above and two below, with body propped by his tail, but High-hole is independent and often sits on a limb as an ordinary percher. (Nature has given the flicker a bill slightly curved, instead of straight and chisel-shaped.) But why does this Westerner parade the woods in a jaunty suit lined with red, while his eastern cousin flaunts from tree to tree in a yellow-lined jacket?

OUT

High-hole is somewhat of a barbarian among the Romans about the pond. He knows nothing about, nor does he care for the finer arts of architecture and music. A dark den suits him as well as a mansion. He has a voice like the "holler" of a lusty-lunged, whole-souled plow-boy. As he swings from stump to stump, his wings flash red like a beacon light. He shouts "Yar-up! Yar-up! Yar-up!" from the tree-top, or occasionally he breaks the woody silence with a prolonged jovial "Ha! Ha! Ha!2

There's always a sentiment of the farm about the flicker. Occasionally I see one of the birds here in the midst of the city, but he always reminds me of a back-woods boy on a visit. He never seems at home among the clanging of the cars and the rumbling of the wagons along the paved streets. A few days ago, I saw one of the woodpeckers light on the side of a brick building above the busy street. I knew it was an inexperienced bird, for he began jabbing at the tin cornice in a way that seemed to me was likely to splinter his bill. It re-

sounded like a drum. He cocked his head with a surprised expression that seemed to say, "That's the funniest tree I ever tapped." Then he flipped across the street and started a tattoo on a window-sill, but some one pushed up the window to see who was trying to get in, and almost scared the youngster witless. The last I saw of him, he was taking a bee line straight across the block for the hills.

With a tinge of regret I've watched the clumps of fir thinned year after year. High-hole does not care a snap. He can bore a hole in a church steeple as easily as in a fir snag. The moral influence on his family is about the same in one place as the other. For two seasons I watched a red-shafted flicker rear his family in the tall steeple of a Presbyterian church in the heart of the city. I was always a little afraid lest the straight-laced divine discover the brood of squabbling youngsters sheltered under the sacred roof, seize a scourge and drive them from the temple. They worked as hard on the Sabbath as any other day of the week. Another flicker dug a home in one of the maples that border the walk about a large grammar school. The poor hen was harassed half to death by attention from the boys, but she reared four lusty shouters.

I have known High-hole for years. For two seasons we have photographed him and his family. He has punctured every old stump about the pond with doors and windows. Every one of these old boles is dead to the roots yet I generally

find them throbbing at the heart more vitally than the greenest neighbor in the clump. Red-hammer is not altogether idle during the months of rain (and snow.) When he does work, he goes like an automatic toy wound to the limit. As soon as the weather brightens into the first warm, spring-like day, he and his wife have a wooden house well near its completion. Last spring when I first discovered the brand-new hole at the top of the stump, the lady of the house sidled around the tree like a bashful school-girl when I went near, always keeping on the opposite side and peeking around the curve.

Few birds have larger families than High-hole. But, were it not for the number of his family, how could he hold his own among so many enemies? His conspicuous size and color always draw the aim of the small boy's gun, and every village lad in the land has collected flicker's eggs. He is a fellow of expediency, however. If his home is robbed, his wife soon lays another set of eggs. It is on record that one pair, when tested by the removal of egg after egg, laid seventy-one eggs in seventy-three days.

In the hollowed heart of the punky ^{Juncamoor} fir, on a bed of fine wood bits, lay seven glossy eggs, inanimate, but full of promise. They all had the vital flesh tinge of pink. Each imprisoned a precious spark of life, to be fanned by the magic brooding of the mother's breast.

Red-hammer had grown quite trustful. We got a ladder

twenty-five feet long which reached about up to the nest. The eggs had been placed a foot and a half below the round entrance. On the opposite side from the entrance and on a level with the eggs, we sawed out a back door, giving a good view of the living room, and letting in a little sunlight. With the camera ready to snap, firmly fastened to a small board, we climbed the tree. Holding it out to a measured distance, we aimed it downward at the eggs. The first attempt came nearer landing camera and all in a heap in the shallow water of the pond, than getting a photograph of the eggs, but after several trials, a good picture was taken.

Neither mother or father flicker seemed exactly to understand our right of making free with their home. The former nervously returned to her nest each time we descended the tree. She climbed in the front door. It was easy enough to recognize her own eggs, but that new door was a puzzle. She had to slip out and examine it a half a dozen times, returning always by the round door above. This modernized dwelling made her a little uneasy, but she soon settled down, satisfied to brood and watch her gossiping neighbors at the same time. After we fastened up the new entrance, flicker affairs went on as usual.

OUT { Some of our later visits were certainly a little tiresome for the brooding mother. A knock at the foot of the tree was generally gollowed by an impatient eye and a danger-

OUT } ous looking bill at the threshold, the greeting a busy housewife gives an intruding peddler. With a bored look, she flipped across the way and sat while the visitors nosed about and prowled in her house.

Those naked baby flickers were the ugliest little bird youngsters I ever saw. High-hole did not carry their dinners in her bill as a warbler feeds her young. She nourished the bantlings with the partially digested food of her own craw. She jabbed her long sharp beak down their throats till I thought she'd stab them to death. Yet they liked it. They called for more with a peculiar hissing noise. A few feet away it sounded more like the buzz of maddened bees. I always feel like jumping to the ground and taking to the timber the instant that swarmy sound strikes my ear. It's not exactly cowardice, but bird curiosity once led me to pry into the sacred precincts of a hornet's nest in a hollow log. I've been a little skittish since. I'm not sure of Nature's reason for providing woodpeckers with such a peculiar baby prattle, but I know the sound has scared more than one boy into shying away from a flicker's home.

In the heart of the fir the development was rapid. The thin drawn lids of each callow prisoner cracked and revealed a pair of black eyes. Feathers sprouted and spread from the rolls of fatty tissue up and down their backs. Each bill pointed ever upward to the light; the instant the doorway dar-

kened, each sprung open to its limit. The nestlings soon took to climbing the walls, not solely for amusement. The sharp ears of each youngster caught the scrape of the mother's claws the instant she clutched the bark of the tree, and this sound always precipitated a neck-stretching scramble toward the door. The young woodpeckers had little chance of exercising their wings, so the next time we climbed the tree with the camera, they were apparently full grown, strong in climbing, but to our advantage, weak in flying.

We are not likely to forget the day we climbed the stump to picture the young flickers. The full significance of the task had not struck us. Nor had the enjoyment of it dawned upon the fledglings. They were bashful at first, but after a little coaxing and fondling, they were as tame as pet pussies. They climbed out and crowded the stump-top, where they sat in the warm sunshine stretching, fluffing, bowing and preening.

They liked to cling to our clothing. A coat sleeve was easier climbing than a tree trunk, and it was softer to penetrate with a peck. There was a streak of ambition in the soul of each flicker that would put most people to shame. They climbed continually and always toward the top. Up our arms to our shoulders they would go, and then to our heads. Just at the instant one's mind and energy were directed toward balancing in the tree-top, he was sure to get a series of jabs in the cheek. One might endure the scratch of the sharp claws as they penetrated his clothing, now and then, but he would be

likely to cringe under the sting of a chisel-shaped drill boring with rapid blows into his arm.

I couldn't see any use of the parents working themselves to death feeding such ravenous, full-grown children. "They might as well hustle a little for themselves," I said, as I climbed the stump next morning. We took all five of the fledglings to the ground. Wild strawberries they gulped down with a decided relish, until we got tired and cut short the supply. We soon had a regular "Yar-uping" concert. One young cock clutched the bark with his claws, his stiff pointed tail feathers propping his body in the natural woodpecker position, as he hitched nestward up the tree followed by his mates.

Afterward when I set all five on a nearby limb with the order "Company, attention! Right dress!" they were the rawest and most unruly recruits I ever handled. If the upper guide did not keep moving, he received a gouge from his impatient neighbor below. This was sure either to set the whole squad in motion, or to start a family brawl, without regard to the aggravated patience of the bird photographer. "About, face" was executed with the same lack of discipline on the part of the feathered company. The captain stepped meekly around to the other side of the limb and planted himself and camera in the rear.

During our early acquaintance, the fledgling flickers savagely resisted our attempts to coax them out of their home.

After a few hours in the warm sunshine, they fought every effort to put them back. They were no longer nestlings, for a bit of confidence had transformed them into full-fledged birds of the world.

OUT

The following day a casual observer might have noticed that the flicker population of the fir woods had increased. Here and there, one caught sight of a bird bearing the emblem of a black crescent hung about his neck. Juvenile yar-ups echoed among the scattered trees and over the pond. Occasionally there were flashes of red as wings opened and closed and a bird swung through the air in wave-like flight.