

PHOTOGRAPHING A FLICKER FAMILY.

1 * If I were the owner of the Oregon firs about the reed-covered pond and were drawing rental from the bird tenants, I'd rather take a lease from the flicker or woodpecker than any other feathered resident. He has punctured every old stump about the pond with doors and windows. He is not half as particular as some of the other birds. 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 some way and reared a thriving family.

2 * I have known High-hole (~~or Red-hamer~~) for years. For two seasons, we have photographed him and his family. He is somewhat of a barbarian 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. When he works 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.

3 * With a tinge of regret, I've watched the clump of firs thinned year after year. High-hole does not care a snap. He can bore a hole in a church steeple as easily as a fir snag. The moral influence on his family is about the same in one place as in the other. For two seasons, I watched a red-shafted flicker rear his family in the steeple of Calvary Presbyterian Church in the heart of the city. I was a little afraid least 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 harder on the sabbath than any other day of the week.

4 4*
In the hollowed heart of the punky 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.

5 5*
Red-hammer had grown quite trustful. To get this picture of her eggs, we got a ladder twenty-five feet long, which reached almost up to the nest. The eggs were placed a foot and a half below the round entrance. On the opposite side of the entrance, and on a level with the eggs, we sawed out this back door, giving a good view of the living room, and letting in a little sun light. 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, the picture was taken.

OUT
Neither mother nor 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 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 neighbors at the same time.) ^{However} After we fastened up the new entrance Flicker affairs went on as usual.

6* 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.

7* 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, which would discount that in most people. 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 sharp claws as they penetrated his clothing, but he was likely to cringe under the sting of a chisel-shaped drill boring into his arm.

8* 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. 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.

9X Afterward, when I set all five on a near-by 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 and planted himself and camera in the rear.

10X

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.

Close work at the Flicker's nest may give you an indication of some of the problems the ^{bird} photographer has to solve but I can give you a better idea of the difficulties of tree-top photography by showing you a series of pictures of the Red-tailed hawk.