

A Chapter from the Life History of a Pair of Robins.

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On Tuesday, May 6th, a pair of robins (*Merula migratoria*) began building a nest in a spruce tree in front of our house. The site was chosen in thick twigs near the centre of the tree. The female collected the material and did the building. The male stayed near his mate but never offered to assist, and even seemed to regret that housekeeping was soon to claim his attention. We did not like his ways just then, for we thought he was too lazy to be a good mate. Later on, however, he won our best wishes and redeemed his character. The material collected was grass stems, moss, and small rags for a foundation, and grass with root and earth attached for the walls. The work was done in the early part of the day, and in placing the material the female would get in the centre and place the nesting around her. After working two days they left the nest, evidently to allow the walls to dry. On May 11th the nest had been lined with fine grasses and contained one egg. After this an egg was laid each succeeding day until the clutch of four was complete, and the female began to incubate them. This duty she faithfully performed for twelve days when the young broke the shells and there were four wee robins to be fed. The pieces of broken shells were carried by the old birds away from the nest.

During the period of incubation Old Split-tail, as we named the male (for he had lost the two middle feathers of his tail) began to show his good qualities. He fed the female on the nest and kept other robins away from the field which later was to be his hunting ground.

When the young were hatched there was a very slight trace of down on the feather tracts. On the fourth day the feather tracts showed the dark shade of coming feathers, and the lower mandible was somewhat the longer. On the seventh day the eyes were open, the flight feathers an inch and one-fourth long, tail feathers half an inch long, and the body feathers showed plainly. On the ninth day, the wing feathers were one and three-quarter inches long, tail three-quarters, and body feathers one-half inch long. The upper mandible was the longer. The growth continued, but the young did not care to be handled, so no more measurements were taken.

Fourteen days were spent in the nest, during which time they were well fed by both parents, who would also remove any filth from the nest when they would go away for food. Some days when the weather was very warm the female would stand on the edge of the nest with wings and tail spread and drooping and shade the sun from the young. She did not do this continually, but only for short periods between excursions after food. During ordinary weather when one of the parents would see the other coming to the nest with food it would immediately depart. At times one would be seen to stop on a wood-pile and give two low calls, and the other would answer with one note from the nest,

when the first to call would fly direct to the nest. As a rule the male would go into the nest from one direction; the female approached from the other side. The food collected was earthworms, cutworms, larvæ of June beetles, and we often saw them take March-flies which were very plentiful on the grass. The flies were stragglers from a huge swarm which passed this place. Such a multitude was there that the noise of their wings was like a strong wind. They extended over a mile in width, were more than an hour passing; the sky was clouded with their numbers, which extended from about twenty feet above the earth, to an unknown height. After being out of the nest three days the young were left to partly care for themselves, and Mr. and Mrs. Split-tail began to build another nest in a tree a few feet from the first nest. Three eggs were laid in this nest, and now Old Split-tail's good qualities were well displayed. He would feed two of the young that followed him about the lawn, and also take food to his mate, besides having an occasional tussle with trespassing neighbors.

On first going out of the house one morning his cries of distress called my attention to where he was fighting something in the grass. Mrs. Split-tail sat on a wood-pile also much interested. Thinking he might be fighting a snake I went to help in the fray, and when Old Split-tail saw me, he came towards me with cries of distress as though asking me to assist him. This move of his allowed his enemy—which proved to be another robin—to get to the wood-pile, where they had another fight, Split-tail easily winning, and seeming much encouraged by my presence. An unlooked for change came. Mrs. Split-tail sat only a few days when she set her partner at the duty of incubating the eggs, and she built another nest, laid two eggs, and began the dutiful task of incubating them! In the meantime Mr. Split-tail had done his duty well, and he had a family of three young robins to care for. July 10th, Mrs. Split-tail was back to the second nest looking very much downhearted, and Mrs. Moore remarked that she must be sick. I said that if she was back to that nest that the nest in the birch tree must be robbed, for I had seen a robin chasing a red squirrel about the tree a little time before. Sure enough such was the case, and later in the day Mrs. Split-tail was at work helping feed the second brood. This brood left the nest July 14th, and nine squirrels of the immediate vicinity have died violent deaths from injuries inflicted by a lover of birds.

Had it not been for the split-tail of the male of this pair of robins we would not have known that the three nests belonged to only one pair of birds. There was no mistaking the mark, and we were able to read an interesting chapter from the life history of a pair of robins.

Miss Grammar—I thought you had decided to embrace the profession of teaching?

Miss Normal—Yes; but a profession of love came my way, and I decided to embrace that,