

of the morsel by swallowing it; a higher example of maternal devotion would be hard to find.

One purple martin looks very much like another, and it is, of course, on their essential resemblances that the species is founded. But the close study of any species of animal always discloses more or less marked differences between individuals, not only in structure and appearance, but in temperament also. It is said that individuality can be noticed in creatures as low in the scale of life as the annelids, and that earthworms display marked idiosyncrasies of conduct. If this be true, we may confidently look for decided variations in the mental traits of purple martins, and an incident I observed this year seems to confirm the expectation.

The guiding principle of the purple martin ethic is a virulent family egoism. Charity both begins and ends at home, and all there ever is to spare for a neighbour is a peck or a curse. But while watching the young birds being fed, I remarked an astonishing exception to this rule. On three different occasions, the father of apartment No. 5 was seen, after he had rammed a few insects into the gaping mouths of his own offspring, to bestow the rest of his beakful on the young of apartment No. 4 next door, who, in the general habit of all young martins, always reached out long eager necks and clamored for food when they saw their youthful neighbours being fed. This behaviour of father No. 5 was unique. Not the smallest spark of generosity was ever seen to warm the frigid selfishness of any of the others; and the question is: did this action presage the dawn of a martin altruism, or was father No. 5 merely too stupid to distinguish his neighbour's young from his own? Optimists will adopt the first alternative, pessimists the last.

Shortly after the middle of July, some of the young begin to creep out onto the verandah; and now it becomes plain that my bird-house, although built on an approved plan, does not sufficiently imitate the deep cavities in trees that are the birds' natural habitations. For the adventurous nestlings, crawling out too soon from the shallow cabins of the house, accidentally tumble off the verandahs, or launch out before they can fly properly and come piteously to the ground, where they fall an easy prey to prowling cats. We always keep a lookout for these rash youngsters, and either put them back into their nest, or if they are nearly fledged, place them on the branch of a tree, where the old birds feed them for a day or two until they can fly. But in spite of all our care, the cats get four or five of them every year.

As soon as the fledglings can take the wing, the whole family leaves the house for good, and during the rest of the season spends the nights in the tree tops. By the first of August all are flown, and the house is empty. For about three weeks after this they may still be seen hawking in flocks of four or five—probably family groups—and