

A BROOD OF FLICKERS AND HOW THEY WERE FED.

By A. G. KINGSTON.

In an article under the above title published in *The Auk* for July last Mr. Wm. Brewster, the well-known ornithologist, of Cambridge, Mass., recounts some highly interesting observations made by him on the breeding and feeding habits of a pair of these woodpeckers.

The decayed tree in which the nest had been excavated in this instance was accidentally broken off when the nestlings were about a week old, in such a way as to leave them almost entirely uncovered; and Mr. Brewster, by concealing himself not many feet away, was able to view clearly all the operations of this woodland nursery. His notes are given in minute detail. They show that in this species the young are fed by *regurgitation*.

The old bird used to visit the nest to feed the young at intervals of from twenty to sixty minutes. It was seen that no food was carried in the bill and apparently little or none in the mouth or upper throat; but looking down into the five clamorous and wide-open mouths, the parent would plunge its bill deep into the first, "as if," says the writer, "with the design of piercing its offspring to the vitals," and by a series of quick, convulsive movements, would seem to pump up the food from its own stomach and inject it into that of the young bird. And so with the next nestling and the next, until all were satisfied or the store was exhausted. The prey of the Flicker is known to consist largely of ants, together with such larvæ, &c. as inhabit dead wood; and it is apparent that by swallowing each insect as soon as captured, the bird would be able to collect, and hold securely to the end of the trip, sufficient food to supply the whole or a large portion of the family.

It is pleasing to learn that in spite of the exposure to the weather through the unroofing of their home, and in spite of the loss of the mother bird, which seems to have been destroyed about the time that Mr. Brewster began his observations, the whole five nestlings were safely reared, at least until able to fly away from sight.

Opportunities like this for studying the breeding habits of woodpeckers and other birds that breed in holes are rare indeed, but they may occur to any student of bird life. One who is lucky enough to stumble on another such chance should not fail to use diligently both eye and pencil.