

Economic Value of Birds

Enormous Losses thru Insects—Habits of Western Birds
By Dr. E. A. Blakely

The Biological Bureau of the Department of Agriculture of the United States claims that one billion dollars a year is lost in that country thru the ravages of insects. The wheat growers lose \$100,000,000 a year thru the chinch-bug and the cotton growers half that amount by the weevil. The farmers of the Eastern States pay \$15,000,000 for material to destroy the potato-bug. The apple producing states pay \$3,000,000 for spraying trees to keep down the codling moth. Truck raisers lose yearly \$55,000,000 by insects. Shade trees everywhere and our forests are being destroyed by insects. Birds only are able to hold in check these destructive pests. W. T. Hornady, of New York Zoological Park, probably the greatest authority on the economic value of birds, says 90 per cent. of the bird life has been destroyed and 45 per cent. of it in the last fifteen years. He claims that there are only four states in the American Union where birds are increasing in numbers. This accounts for the disastrous results.

By examining the contents of the crop of different birds experts have given us valuable information as to their food, showing their economic value to the farmer. A swallow's stomach was found to contain 40 entire chinch-bugs, fragments of many others and 10 other species of insects. Another swallow's crop had 68 weevils and another a large number of mosquitoes. Two stomachs of pine siskins contained 1,900 black olive scales and 300 plant lice. A killdeer's stomach contained 300 mosquito larvae, and a flicker 28 white grubs. A night hawk had eaten 340 grasshoppers, 52 bugs, 3 beetles, 2 wasps and a spider. Fifty-one species of birds eat hairy caterpillars and 38 species feed on plant lice. These facts show how beneficial the birds are to the farmers.

The following are some of the common birds of Manitoba: The robin and blue-bird should be classed among the most useful birds as they are the first arrivals in the spring, and while they may not destroy as many insects as some other birds, they begin their work earlier when every moth and worm killed counts. It is interesting to watch one of these birds on its perch, looking for its prey, till it flies down to catch a moth, draw a worm from the ground or pull a weed to get the wire worm at its root.

The Baltimore oriole is as useful as it is beautiful. Like the robin it often builds its hanging nest near the house or in the garden shrubbery, but more secluded. It returns to its year after year as some other birds do. Its nest should never be disturbed lest it might be led to seek some more congenial locality.

The house wren is one of the most beneficial birds that can be attracted to one's place, feeding wholly upon insects. It is very confiding, seeming to prefer the society of the household, making its nest in the most unexpected situation about the buildings.

The catbird is a persistent songster with an indescribable melody like that of the mocking bird. It delights in singing by the hour, making its song up as it goes along. Its food is insects and wild fruit. The brown thrasher has habits similar to the catbird, but sings a sweeter song. The thrushes are most delightful singers and it seems the sadder the day the sweeter they sing. Martins, swifts and swallows eat enormous quantities of rose-beetles, may-beetles, cucumber-beetles, house flies and mosquitoes, all caught on the wing.

Kingbirds, phoebe, wood pewees and flycatchers feed largely upon flies and flying insects. Warblers are the most beautiful, interesting and useful birds that we have. They feed largely among the foliage upon small and mostly injurious insects. The red-eyed vireo is the most common of the vireos, but its eyes are more likely to be brown than red. It makes a hanging nest which is among the most beautiful of bird homes. The night hawk, whose name is a misnomer, is seen toward evening flying, skimming, sailing and swooping over the top of buildings. It makes its nest on the gravel roofs or the top of a flat rock.

The crowbird is the uncivilized member of the bird world. It builds no nest for itself, but slyly deposits its eggs in the nest of some other bird, usually that of a warbler, sparrow or vireo.

The cuckoo is a most valuable bird for it consumes large quantities of the fuzzy tent caterpillar. It sometimes shirks its responsibility by adopting the practice of the cowbird. Woodpeckers live almost entirely on insects, beetles, grubs, larvae, ants, etc. A few years ago a war of extermination was waged in some of the Eastern States against them on account of the damage done to fruit trees, but they are now endeavoring to restore them for their good work in protecting their parks and forests from the destroying insects. Flickers are often found on the ground in pastures or on hillsides feeding upon ants. They have the undulating flight common to all woodpeckers. They nest anywhere in a hole in a tree or post and lay a large number of eggs.

The redwinged blackbirds by their destruction of injurious insects and weed seeds pay in advance for all the damage they do to the grain fields in the fall. The meadowlarks are familiar friends of our fields and meadows. We find them along the roads singing on the fence posts or telephone wires. The bobolink, with its sweet music often uttered on the wing, is much admired. Its song is a rippling repetition of his name with many additional trills and notes. The chickadee is one of the most popular birds and is common about the farms. The beautiful goldfinch has a sweet canary song. Its flight is a peculiar series of undulations accompanied by its intermittent twitter. Its favorite food is thistle seed. The chipping sparrow seems to be fond of building its nest in the vines around the veranda when not driven away by the English sparrow. The vesper sparrows are the afternoon songsters in the trees or on the fence along the roadsides. The food of the finches, sparrows, pine siskins, grosbeaks, snowbirds, towhees and buntings are almost entirely weed seeds.

BULLETIN ON BARN VENTILATION

At this season of the year, when many farmers are erecting new barns or remodeling those already built, the subject of ventilation is worthy of very careful study. To help the builder to a proper understanding of the principles involved, and to give him detailed instructions as to how a ventilation system should be installed, the Manitoba Department of Agriculture has just published Extension Bulletin No. 2, entitled Barn Ventilation. This bulletin has been written by L. J. Smith, Professor of Agricultural Engineering at Manitoba Agricultural College. The two systems of barn ventilation that have been proven most suitable under our climatic conditions have been the Rutherford system and the King system. Both of these are described in complete detail, and diagrams are presented so as to make clear to the eye the whole method of construction. Farmers and others desiring one of these bulletins should write the Publications Branch, Department of Agriculture.

THE NECESSITY OF EDUCATION

The following answers were recently taken from examination papers of applicants for admission to a university:—

The chancre is valuable for its feathers; the whale for its kerosene oil.

The feminine gender of friar is toastress. The feminine gender of bull is Mrs. Bull.

There were no christians among the early Gauls; they were mostly lawyers. Climate is caused by the emotion of the earth around the sun.

Four animals belonging to the cat family are the father cat, the mother cat and two little kittens.

Geometry teaches us how to insect angels.

The purpose of the skeleton:—Something to hitch meat to. The skeleton is what is left after the muscles have been taken out and the outside have been taken off.

A blizzard is the inside of a hen. A vacuum is a large empty space where the Pope lives.

A circle is a round straight line with a hole in the middle.

When Ceres delivered this oration he was a prefix.—From The Public.

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