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BIRD-HOUSES AND THEIR OCCUPANTS.*

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Like *Derdemonia*, we "have a divided duty". On the one hand to cultivate the land cleanly, and on the other, to attract birds to it. These are opposed duties. If we cut the dead wood from our wood lots, parks, and groves; clean out, sterilize, and fill rotting spots in limb and trunk with concrete, we deprive many birds of nesting facilities. If we clear out tangled brush, cultivate to the fence lines, open the ground about young, second-growth plantations, and drain the last marshy spots, we deprive many of necessary cover and the food that goes with it. Insect, weed, and small mammal pests may be reduced; but so, inevitably, will the birds as well. The consequence is likely to be that, whilst our control of pests on the whole will be better, we shall be subject to occasional sporadic outbursts of species that are not subject to these particular methods of control. Whilst the study of their food habits may suggest that birds do not usually partake largely of those insects (for example, the potato bug) whose numbers commonly assume plague proportions, it is also evident that insects that birds systematically feed upon, rarely become plagues. We know, to our sorrow, the few instances where our control is inadequate, but we have no means of knowing the innumerable cases where it has warded off disaster.

The real value of birds as guardians of our fields and gardens is not in the individual species but in the aggregate, each filling its own narrow field, yet all combined, covering every weak point. The swallows hawk through the upper air; the vireos, orioles, and tanagers haunt the tree tops; the woodpeckers and chickadees, the limbs and bark crevices; whilst thrushes examine the debris of wooded grounds and the sparrows and meadow larks scour open fields and shrubbery tangles. In fact at no period of their life cycles are insects free from avian attack—flying, creeping, hiding or buried in the ground or in solid wood—there are species of birds fitted for and eager to attack them. Should any one class of these, our unpaid assistants, be

prevented from functioning, an opening is left in our defence that may be an Achilles' heel to our undoing. If we turn our woods into groves, meadows into lawns, and tangles into formal shrubbery something of this sort is possible, unless compensations are provided. In the home grounds and city streets and parks the ideal of clean cultivation is most nearly approached and here it is the more necessary to provide artificially the necessities of bird life that are missing.

Bird boxes will largely compensate for natural cavities in trees and carefully selected plantings of shrubbery and decorative flowers in naturalistic design will supply cover and fruit and seed food. If we fortunately succeed in reducing insects to a point dangerous to bird welfare the deficiency can be supplied by scraps of animal matter presented at feeding stations, on shelves, or in shelters. In these ways only can we partially compensate for our interference with the natural scheme and retain wild birds under conditions of high cultivation. Incidentally, as the home lot is the first to be made attractive to birds, we draw their interesting personalities close about us, and in place of having to tramp miles to their secluded haunts, decoy them to our very windows where they can be enjoyed practically continuously instead of occasionally, intimately instead of distantly, and at ease instead of by exertion. Any one of the methods above suggested requires, for intelligent development, a paper to itself; and the first, only, the building of bird houses and boxes, will be here discussed.

The first thing to consider in building a bird box is the species for which it is designed. Each has its own requirements and though its necessities are more or less elastic the more nearly we fulfil the bird's ideal the more successful we shall be in getting it to use what we provide. In short we must cater to the customs and idiosyncrasies of our tenants and not to our own ideas of convenience and beauty. It

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