

Protection of Birds a Farm Asset

BY C. C. CLUTE

IN "OUR DUMB ANIMALS"

If one tenth of all the agricultural products raised annually in the United States were scattered over different sections of the country where most needed, would it help fight the high cost of living? Statistics show that annually there is a loss of between \$800,000,000 and \$900,000,000 in the agricultural products of the United States, all due to the ravages of insects.

This fact was cited recently by a leading Chicago paper, and it was further cited that the loss might be materially lessened were birds protected as they should be. When one of the leading metropolitan newspapers of the land advocates that every available plot of ground be turned into a garden spot and cultivated, and when in the same issue that same paper urges that birds be protected that they might destroy insects, it is surely time for every one to consider what part he is to do in the work, and, insofar as possible lend a hand in doing his mite. One insect destroyed in the spring means the destruction of hundreds, and in some cases thousands, ere the summer is over.

Government statistics and personal observations show over and over again that the birds are the farmers' best friends, which, in return for their services, ask only protection that they may bring forth more enemies of insects.

Just how is this protection to be given? Happily the time is passed, or nearly so, when the farmers think that the birds must be destroyed because of the fruit they eat. In comparison with the amount of good they do, the amount of fruit eaten by birds during the summer is an infinitesimal matter,—a mighty good form of insurance for the farmer.

But there is another way in which the birds require protection, and that

is protection during their nesting season. Not only should prowling cats be restrained and egg collectors either be made to see the folly of their heartless whims or else be summoned before the law, but provision should be made for the nests. Birds like company. Even the bluejay, usually termed a rascal but at heart a boon companion of the farmer, likes to have his nest near a dwelling. The robin appreciates forked sticks placed in trees for him, and the wren, bluebird, and purple martin enjoy the companionship of man as soon as they learn that he is their friend.

The best way to get on amicable terms with birds is to build and put up bird-houses and see that such are not destroyed by boys or preyed upon by cats. Put up a single birdhouse this summer if you are a skeptic and watch the wren, or bluebird, or purple martin, as it feeds its young, taking note of the kind of feed it uses and the number of trips made per hour. Keep a record of this for a few hours, estimate the good done in a day, in a week, in a month, and in a nesting season, and you will be wiser the following year.

I know one farmer in particular who lost, during one summer, three rows of corn forty rods long. The corn grew next to a fence row heavily sodded with blue grass, which produced swarms of grasshoppers. For the sake of experiment alone, for this farmer was a skeptic, last spring he put up twenty-one bird-houses, placed two rods apart on the fence along the forty rods. The houses were some that he and the boys had made during the winter months, from dry-goods boxes obtained in town. Thirteen of the twenty-one houses were inhabited during the following summer, six by wrens, four by bluebirds, and three by colonies of purple martins.

The grasshoppers that summer