

BIRDS OF THE OREGON WOODS

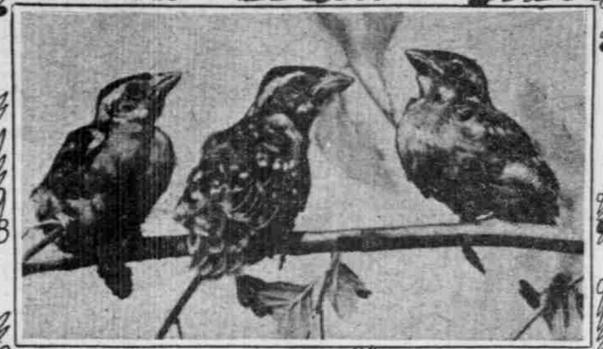
SOME STUDIES IN COLOR - By WILLIAM LOVELL FINLEY -
- ILLUSTRATED BY HENRY T. BOHLMAN -



YOUNG GOLD FINCHES ON LIMB OF CHERRY TREE.



YOUNG RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS' NEST.



YOUNG HUMMING-BIRD - SITTING ON CLOTHES LINE.

YOUNG GROSBEAKS.

YOUNG TOWHEE OR GROUND ROBIN - SOMETIMES CALLED CAT-BIRD.



HUMMING-BIRD ON NEST - SHOWING A LOOSE STRING THAT WAS WOVEN INTO THE NEST FOR SUPPORT.



FINLEY AND BOHLMAN PHOTOGRAPHING A TANAGER'S NEST - 85 FEET FROM GROUND.



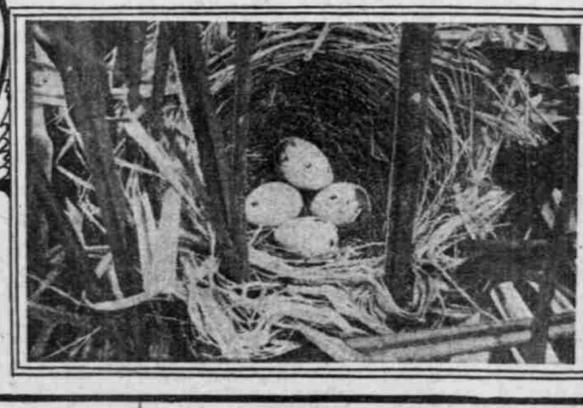
HUMMING-BIRD ON EDGE OF NEST.



FEMALE BLACK-HEADED GROSBREAK WITH FOOD FOR YOUNG.



LAZULI BUNTING ABOUT TO FEED YOUNG.



NEST AND EGGS OF RED WINGED BLACK-BIRD IN REEDS.

In the study of bird life the brilliant colors of some songsters appeal as strongly to the eye as the music of others do to the ear. But why are some of our birds so gaily colored and others so plainly dressed? Since the time of Darwin, naturalists have generally accepted the theory of protective coloration among birds, that is, the species continues to live by natural selection, which preserves those colors that are most useful in concealing it from enemies. That this theory has been greatly overworked was shown recently by John Burroughs, in an article entitled, "Gay Plumage and Dull," in the June number of the Atlantic Monthly.

If dull colors are necessary to protect our birds from their enemies, then bright colors are dangerous, and it would seem that our gaily colored birds would, in time, be exterminated. This is not likely to be the case. Our plain-colored Brewer's blackbird has no apparent advantage over the redwing with its brilliant epaulets. The evening grosbeak, that visit Portland in great flocks every winter, and are so strikingly colored; the black-headed grosbeak, the crimson-headed tanager, the Oregon towhee, the lazuli bunting, the Bullock's oriole and the goldfinch are all bright-colored birds, yet they all hold their own with the dull-colored sparrows, the wrens, the swallows and the flycatchers. Our male China pheasant is an example of a game bird that is not protected by dull colors as our native pheasant and grouse are, yet it will live where the latter are almost exterminated. The female, of course, wears a dull-colored dress, but this gives little protection from her worst enemies. The dog flushe her out to be shot and other animals destroy her and her eggs mainly through the sense of smell and not of sight.

Concert Music.

Whenever I want to spend a few hours among the birds in the hope of finding something new, I seek an old haunt where I have gone many times before, and where for years I have tramped the same ground and studied the same species. I find the pages of my notebooks are filled with the records of two or three such places. There is an old pond just at the edge of the city, where every few yards of the whole area is marked by the memory of a bird home I have visited, and almost every bush and tree has found a place in my bird history.

The concert music for the world about the pond is furnished principally by a

band of red-winged blackbirds and two pair of song sparrows, the former doing the chorus work and the latter coming in for the solos and the refrains. The redwings return early from the South each year, and they are busy the whole summer. One pair will generally rear two broods. In the early Spring young singers are all artists, but as the summer wears on you have a whole crowd of untrained vocalists, who do nothing but practice the whole day long. But in place of the lyrical carnivals, I always enjoy the increase of interest that the younger generation brings to the pond.

Protects Her Young.

The redwing swings its nest only a foot about the water, half-twined and woven in among the reeds. One day we found four fuzzy youngsters as still as death crouching down in a nest. We worked the camera up into position for a picture as easily as possible, and were just focusing when the mother dropped from one of the limbs above with a frightened cry. "Fly! fly! for your lives!" and in a flash every flocking had scattered away in four directions. We couldn't tell where. After a long search we found two of the youngsters lying close in the grass, and put them back on the nest, where they squatted while a picture was taken.

For several years we have watched a pair of grosbeaks that spend their summers on the side of Marquam Hill, in a clump of alders. The same pair, no doubt, has returned to the thicket for at least three or four years. It seems I can almost recognize the notes of their song, if our ears were only tuned to the music of the birds, could we not recognize them as individuals as we know our friends?

Last year we found three spotted eggs in a nest, loosely built among the leaves of the dogwood limbs. When I had seen the father carrying a stick in his mouth, he dropped it and looked as uneasy as a boy who had just been caught with his pockets full of stolen apples. This year the nest was 20 feet down the hill from the old home. They came nearer the ground and placed the thin framework of their nest between the two upright racks of an arrowwood bush. We had never

bothered them very much with the camera, but when they put their home right down within four and a half feet of the ground it looked to me as if they wanted some pictures taken. It was too good a chance for us to miss.

A Bird Emergency Call.

The male generally stayed near the nest. Whenever I went near, he was scared. He cried, "Quit! Quit!" in a frightened tone, and when I didn't, he let out a screech of alarm that brought his wife in a hurry. Any one would have thought I was thirsting for the life-blood of those nestlings. She was followed by a pair of robins, a yellow warbler and a flycatcher, all anxious to take a hand in the owl-hunting. If, indeed, an owl were near, I have often noticed that all the feathered neighbors of a locality will flock at such a cry of alarm. The robins are always the loudest and noisier in their throats, and are the first to respond to a bird emergency call.

I loved to sit and watch the brilliant father. He perched at the very top of the fir and stretched his wings till you could see their lemon lining. He preened his black tail to show his hidden spots of white. Of course, he knew his clothes were made to show. It was his song of motion, just to see him drop from the fir to the bushes below. What roundelay

he whistled, "Whit-te-o! Whit-te-o! Reet!" Early in the morning he showed the quality of his singing. Later in the day, it often lost finish. The notes sounded hard to get out, or as if he were practicing, just running over the keys of an air that hung dim in his memory. But it was pleasing to hear him practice; the atmosphere was too lazy to call for perfect execution. He knew he could pipe a tune to catch the ear, but he had to sit on the tree-top, as if he were afraid some one would catch the secret of his art if he sang lower down. Perhaps he was vain, but I have watched him when he seemed to wobble as unconsciously as I tread.

Feeding the Babies.

The parents fed their bantlings as much on berries as worms and insects. Once I saw the father distribute a whole mouthful of green measuring worms. The next time he had visited a garden down the hillside, for he brought one raspberry in his bill and coughed up three more. Both parents soon got over their mad anxiety every time I looked at their bantlings. In fact, they soon seemed willing enough for me to share the bits from my own lunch, for the youngsters were very fond of pieces of cherry taken from a small stick, twisted in the air above them. Nature has given the grosbeak a large

and powerful bill to crack seeds and kernels, but it seemed to me this would be rather an inconvenience, when it came to feeding children. If it was, the parents did not show it. The mother always cocked her head to one side so her baby could easily grasp the morsel, and it was all so quickly done that only the camera's eye could catch the way she did it. She slipped her bill clear into the youngster's mouth, and he took the bits as hurriedly as if he were afraid the mother would change her mind and give it to the next baby.

Division of Household Duties.

I have watched a good many bird families, but I never saw the work divided up as it seemed to be in the grosbeak household. The first day I stayed about the nest I noticed that the father was feeding the children almost entirely, and whenever he brought a mouthful, he hardly knew which one to feed first. The mother fed only about once an hour, while he fed every ten or 15 minutes. This seemed rather contrary to my understanding of bird ethics. Generally, the male is wilder, and the wife has to take the responsibility of the home.

The next day I watched at the nest, conditions were the same, but I was surprised to see that the parental duties were just reversed. The mother was go-

ing and coming continually with food, while the father sat about in the tree-tops, sang and preened his feathers leisurely, only making the trouble to hunt up one mouthful for his bairns to every sixth or seventh the mother brought. To my surprise, the third day, I found the father was the busy bird again. Out of his plates exposed that day on the grosbeak family. I only got five snaps at the mother and three of these were poor ones. The fourth day I watched the mother seemed to have charge of the feeding again, but she spent most of her time trying to coax the bantlings to follow her off into the bushes. It was hardly the father's day for getting the meals, but on the whole, he fed almost as much as the mother, otherwise the youngsters would hardly have received their daily allowance. I have watched at some nests where the young were cared for almost entirely by the mother, and I have seen others where those duties were taken up largely by the father. Many times I have seen the parents work side by side in rearing a family, but the grosbeaks seemed to have a way of dividing duties equally and alternating with days of rest and labor.

Last year a pair of hummers took up a homestead on a hillside in South Portland. The bank had been cut down to build a road, but the place had been abandoned a generation ago. The hummer saddled her tiny cup on the low-est branch of a small fir at the top of the bank. It looked as if she had picked out a spot to please the photographer.

Buglike Nestlings.

At first, the eggs had a delicate flesh tint of pink. Then, one morning, I stood over the nest like Thomas of old. Some one had replaced the eggs with two tiny black bugs! It might have been a miracle. There was a tiny knob on the end of each little bug that looked as if it might be the beginning of a bill. Each little creature resembled a black bean more than a bird, for each possessed a light streak of brown down the middle of the back. They couldn't be beans, for they were pulsing with life in a lumpy sort of way. I went frequently to look at them. In a few days the little nest-

lings began to fork out all over with tiny black horns, until they would have looked like prickly pears had they been the right color. At the next stage, each tiny horn began to blossom out into a spray of brown down, the yellow at one end grew into a bill, the black skin cracked a trifle and showed two eyes. It was hard to see how these black bugs could turn into birds, but day after day the miracle worked till I really saw two young humming-birds.

When they left the nest, the midlets took up their abode in a back yard nearby. The yard was crossed with three clothes-lines for perches, and the large apple tree in the corner gave abundant shade for the hottest days. In the center was a round bed of geraniums and along the fence were gladioli and nasturtiums. The youngsters simply sucked all the honey out of every flower in the yard. Every morning they went the rounds and collected tribute from the hearts of the new blossoms. As the people came and went about the house, the young birds soon became accustomed to the presence of human beings, and when I filled some flowers with sweet water, it did not take them long to recognize that the flowers in the hand were better than those on the bush.

Fooling a Young Hummer.

Then one day, I dipped my finger in sweetened water and held it up to one of the twins as he sat on the line. I was amused, for such a treat came to him as a complete surprise. Before that when a finger was put up to his nose he poked it but found nothing attractive; now his little tongue darted out and hauled in the sweet. The next instant he was busying himself all about my face and neck, poking for honey. He seemed as enthusiastic as a man who had suddenly struck a new mine, for it all looked alike to him. If one part was sweet, perhaps it all was, and it was high time he was knowing this new source of food, for he had seen such things as people before.

One morning, I found one of the young hummers sitting muffled up on the clothes-line, sound asleep in the sun. The instant I touched the line, he awoke as if from a bad dream, and was all excitement. I didn't have any sweetened water, but I picked up a ripe plum, tore the skin away and held it up. In went the sharp bill, but it came out with thrice the rapidity. Such a face! He almost fell backward off the perch and nearly shook his head off, scolding in little, high shrieks all the time.

WILLIAM L. FINLEY.