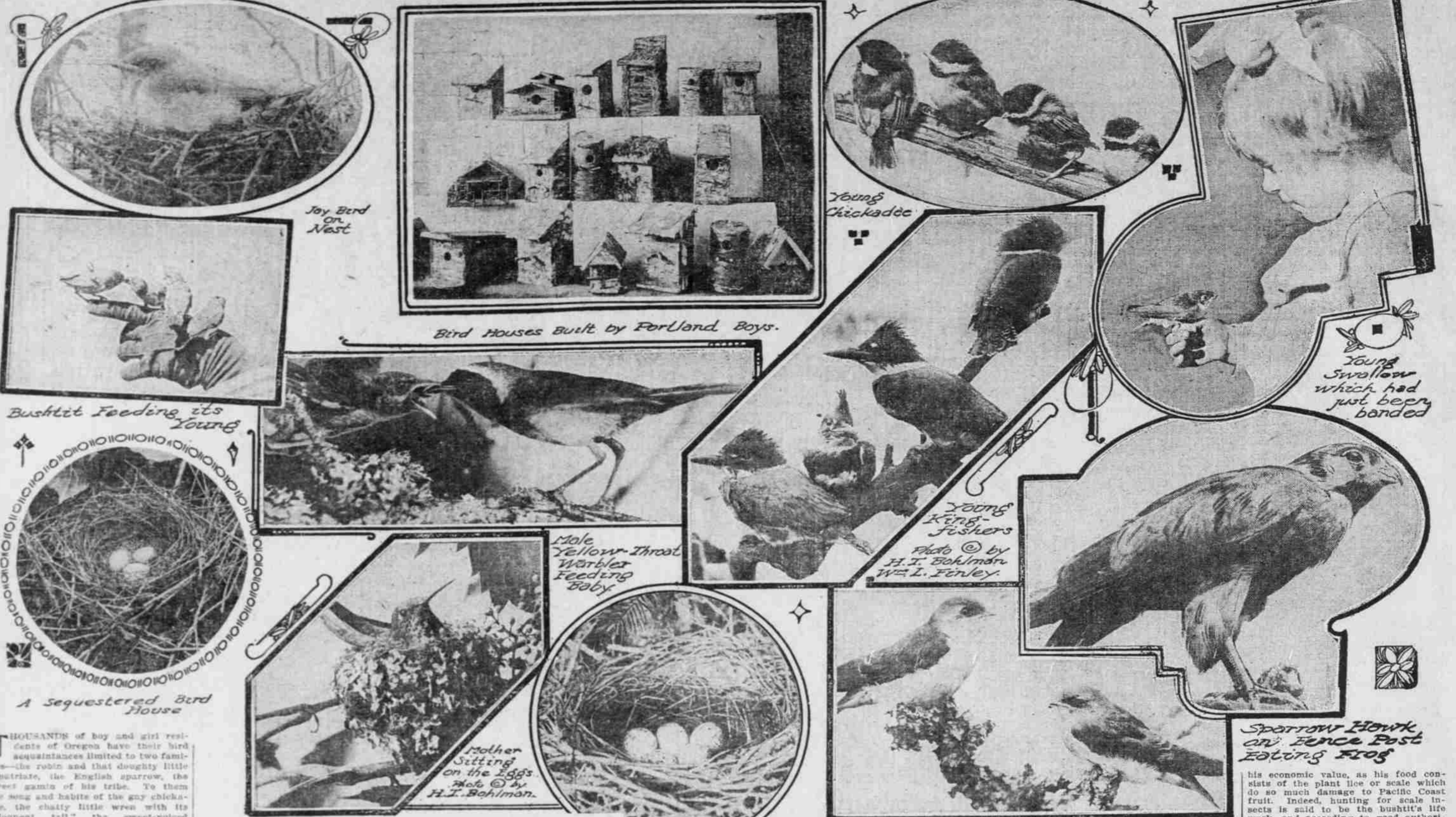


# OREGON SCHOOL BOYS TO BUILD HOUSES FOR SONG BIRDS

Audubon Society and Public Schools Co-operate in Campaign for Bird Study and Protection.



THOUSANDS of boy and girl residents of Oregon have their bird acquaintances limited to two families—the robin and that dainty little sparrow, the English sparrow, the street gambler of his tribe. To them the song and habits of the gay chickadee, the chatty little wren with its "eloquent tail," the sweet-voiced meadow-lark, the shy thrush and even the bright-plumaged grosbeak, are a closed book. They do not even know the joy of the robin's return as the child in the East and Middle West knows it, for in Oregon he stays the winter through and there is no wild rushing to the window for the sight of "the first robin" and no impatient waiting for his "cheer-up" which means many sections of the country means that winter is to vanish and with it break about in days.

Through the co-operation of the Oregon Audubon Society and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction there is about to be inaugurated in Oregon a widespread campaign for systematic bird study and bird protection. The children of the state are to become the birds' landlords, Superintendent Alderman having announced his decision to require every schoolboy in the state of the intermediate grades to construct at least one bird house during the year. The bird houses will be placed in public parks, private residence grounds and along the highways. They will be rented "for a song" impetus to this new architectural venture will be given in some localities through the offering of prizes and the holding of exhibits, where many of the handsomest and most ambitious houses will be offered for sale.

Last May the exhibit of houses built by boys in the Portland manual training schools attracted much attention and aroused the enthusiasm among them that was kept rivaling over both design and execution. Fascinating little huts, some of them with replicas of old-world thatched farm cottages; log cabins, some with side with dainty little houses, some with white birch bark with bits of moss growing artistically on the sloping roofs. The collection represented much ingenuity and artistic craftsmanship, and was the beginning of the state-wide plan to bring school children into closer relationship with their bird neighbors.

of the birds and outlined drawings which may be used by the pupils for coloring. In addition to the leaflets the boys will receive the magazine "Bird-Lore" for a year. The children will be encouraged to collect vacant nests in the fall to be placed in the school collection and studied, noting the difference between the dainty nest of the wren with its soft lining of bits of moss and hair and snake skins and the coarse mud-lined domicile of the robin. The junior Audubons will be expected to hold at least one meeting a month, but it is not likely that a class of young enthusiasts such with his own discoveries of bluebird's nest or robin's courtship will be satisfied with meeting but once a month, particularly during the spring when the bird courting and housekeeping and family-rearing offer such a fertile field for investigation.

**Economic Value Studied.**  
The protection offered the birds is of great economic value to the state, the state biologist having gathered data to prove that many of the common birds of Oregon, frequently looked upon as cherry thieves and mischief makers, are the strongest allies of both horticulturist and agriculturist and deserve not alone protection but warm gratitude. "A bad reputation in the bird," said William Finley, in speaking of the condemnation often made of birds by farmers and orchardists, "is as hard to live down as it is among men. A bird is often condemned on hearsay evidence. Take the hawk. Among most people in the country there is a deep-seated feeling against all hawks. They have seen a hawk swoop down and carry off a chicken and they know they do not persuade that a hawk is good for anything except a professional chicken thief. And under the circumstances we can't be blamed for hating the bodies of hawks; they are not all given to stealing chickens."

Years ago, when the farmers of Pennsylvania saw hawks catching their chickens, they concluded that all hawks and owls were dangerous to their poultry yards. As a result a law was passed offering bounties for the bodies of hawks; the result was that the man who hunted hawks and owls are Nature's check against the great army of harmful rodents that inhabit our gardens and fields. The hawks hunt by day and the owls are especially equipped to supplement their work, having eyesight that is keenest during the early hours of the night and missing where moles, gophers and mice are more active.

**Sparrow Hawk Meritorious.**  
The sparrow hawk is, according to Mr. Finley, one of the several unjustly maligned birds—even his name being against him, for he does not live upon sparrows, but on grasshoppers. A careful study has been made of this bird's food habits and in the stomachs of 230 sparrow hawks only one of them contained the remains of a game bird. He is almost exclusively insectivorous, except when insect food is difficult to obtain. He is the smallest of the family of hawks, and is the most beautifully marked. His general color is a bright red-brown on the back, with lighter brownish breast with black spots. The top of his head is slate colored, with two stripes on the forehead. He builds his nest in a hole in a tree the same as the chickadee.

Another bird of great economic value is the meadow lark. Its food is almost entirely of insect origin, and when the grain is ripening and being harvested the meadow lark lives almost entirely on grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and other insects. It also destroys large numbers of cut worms, army worms and cinch bugs. It has often been accused of eating wheat and other grains, but scientific investigation has proved that grain is of the greatest importance in its diet, nearly three-fourths of its food for the year, including the winter months, consisting of insects. Fortunately, our Oregon laws make it a crime to kill this bird or destroy its nest. While economically the meadow lark is of the greatest importance in any agricultural community, from an esthetic standpoint no meadow is complete without this beautiful songster.

**Only Few Cherries Stolen.**  
Mrs. Russell Sage is rendering financial aid to the National Association of Audubon Societies to secure the passage of laws better calculated to protect the robin. The National association holds that in every state in the Union the robin should be placed on the list of protected species and never be allowed to be killed as game. In Florida, robin may be killed at any time, and in the following Southern States the "open" season varies from one to six months: Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia.

In speaking of the complaints made locally against the robin as a cherry-eater, Mr. Finley says: "The earliest cherries are bothered most, while those that ripen later are not disturbed to any great extent, because of other birds that are ripe at that time. The severest complaints seem to come from places where there are just a few cherry trees in the locality, and to these all the robins come for a feast. In places where the cherry trees are abundant the loss is so scattered that it is not noticed to a great extent." Mr. Finley suggests that as the robins prefer mulberries to cherries, it would be an easy matter to plant a few Russian mulberry trees for the birds. In this way the more valuable fruit would be protected.

**Robin Relies on Human Friends.**  
Of all the common birds, none is more beloved than the robin, nature's optimist. He is the original exponent of cheer, and should be made an honorary member of the sunshine society. His persistence suggests the approach of Spring, bursting apple blossoms, hope renewed. So confidently does he throw himself upon the protection of his human friends, building nests, their houses, doing his family marketing on their lawns and teaching his fledglings the difficult art of flying under their very wings, that he has established such friendly relationship with mankind. And yet even he is branded as a cherry thief and in many of the Southern states is killed as game during the winter season.

**White Breasted Swallows.**  
he is denied the protection under the law here in Oregon for stealing fruit from the trees. Two bluejays are common residents in Western Oregon; the stellar jay, conspicuous for its long crest and deep blue coat; the California jay, which looks more like the bluejay of the Eastern woods in color, the type James Whitcomb Riley described: "In them sassy baseball another's 'hit'."

**Bushtits Marvelous Architects.**  
By the time the Oregon Junior Audubons are starting in on their work, the fascinating little bushtits will be coming back to us from the South, where they stay nine months of the year. The bushtit is distinctly a Western bird in the East. A little larger than a hummingbird but more fluffy in appearance, dressed in modest browns and grays and with a tail as long as his body, he is easily distinguished. He is as easy to make friends with as a chickadee and possesses an unbounded confidence in mankind. Mr. Finley has made many intimate friendships among the bushtits, the young fledglings being so tame they will feed with him on the ground. One of the accomplishments of this little bird is his marvelous skill in nest-building. In the spring he has no equal among the small birds. His nest is a long gourd-shaped one from eight to ten inches in length, with a side entrance at the upper end. "Bushtits are great talkers," said Mr. Finley, "but I have never seen a flock stop for rest. Their appetites never seem satisfied. A flock forms a continual moving procession. A few always take the lead, bobbing along in a tipping flight from tree to tree. Others follow rapidly, and when they take possession of a bush it looks as if the whole thing had suddenly taken wing."

**Crow is of Real Value.**  
Another bird with a beautiful coat but with a bad reputation as a robber and a murderer is the bluejay. He has had a reputation for robbing nests and stealing nestlings for so long that a good many people think he does nothing else but hunt up mischief. "It's mighty hard," says Mr. Finley, "to persuade some people that any good can come of a bluejay. Because of his repu-

good Wright says: "As with many other species of migrant birds, the male in the first to arrive, and he does not seem to be particularly interested in house-hunting until the arrival of the female, when the courtship begins without delay, and the delicate purring song with the refrain: 'Dear, dear, think of it, think of it,' and the low two-syllable answer of the female is heard in every orchard. The building of the nest is not an important function—merely the gathering of a few twigs and straws, with some chance feathers for lining. It seems to be shared by both parents, as are the duties of hatching and feeding the young. The eggs vary in number, six being the maximum.

**As parents the bluebirds are tireless, both in supplying the nest with insect food and attending to its sanitation; the wastage being taken away and dropped at a distance from the nest at almost unvarying short intervals, proving the wonderful rapidity of digestion and the immense amount of labor required to supply the mill inside the little speckled incubator with fresh food.**

**Mrs. Wright points out that it is not easy to tempt bluebirds to an artificial feeding place such as the junkies, chickadees, says, etc., although in the winter she has been able to coax them with dried currants and mill sweepings, the latter being scattered about the trees of her haunts. "Above all things," says Mrs. Wright, "the bluebird, though friendly and seeking the borderland between the wild and the tame, never becomes familiar, and never does he lose the half-remote individuality that is one of his great charms. Though he lives with us and gives no sign of pride of race or birth, he is not of us, as the song sparrow, chippy or even the easily alarmed robin. The poet's mantle envelops him even as the apple blossoms throw a rosy mizzle about his doorway, and it is best so."**

**There are six varieties of the bluebird familiar to the biologist, the Western bluebird, familiar in Oregon, being of a deeper shade of blue with the forehead in part chestnut, while his Eastern brother is entirely blue as to back, wings and tail. Both the Eastern and Western bluebird have breast and sides of a rusty brown, that of the Western bird being a brighter chestnut. He ranges from Northern California to British Columbia and east to Nevada.**

**Into close touch with the human family none is more beloved than Jenny Wren. Her beautiful and persistent song is one of the Summer's joys and her departure in the Autumn after having reared from three to six broods is always a matter of regret. The House wrens are extremely sociable and take very quickly to nesting-boxes put up for them near the homes of their human friends. A house 4x12 inches with a sloping roof to shed water and an opening two inches from the bottom and not more than one inch in diameter, will meet the family requirements of Johnny and Jenny Wren and keep out the usurping English sparrow.**

**Above all things, the wren seems to esteem coziness," says Mabel Osgood Wright in writing of these birds, "and if a nook or an apartment has too high a ceiling they immediately do away with the objectionable feature by raising the floor. Make your houses of the right size," she admonishes, "and not one, but a dozen. Think out the location and see that they are at least partly protected from the sun. Do not put the houses too close together. For the Middle West an Oregon is always a matter of regret. The House wrens are extremely sociable and take very quickly to nesting-boxes put up for them near the homes of their human friends. A house 4x12 inches with a sloping roof to shed water and an opening two inches from the bottom and not more than one inch in diameter, will meet the family requirements of Johnny and Jenny Wren and keep out the usurping English sparrow."**

**Once established in a locality, the wren clings to it, and the boys and girls who succeed this year in coaxing wren neighbors may look forward with a good deal of certainty to their return next year.**

**The black-headed grosbeak is another Western bird—a cousin of the rose-breasted grosbeak found in the East and Middle West. The Oregon grosbeak has a black head, a red-brown breast brightening to a lemon yellow under the wings and below, a black tail and wings with two blue bars. The female is dressed demurely in dark brown and buff. The song is the rollicking carol of the Western robin and the male and female are very shy about singing when on the nest. In fact they are afraid to, but Mr. Finley says that many times he has found the grosbeak mother singing a lullaby to her babies in the nest. The parents feed their nestlings on a diet of both fruit and insects, and although nature has given the grosbeak a large and powerful bill to crack seeds and kernels it seems not to be an inconvenience when feeding the babies. Mr. Finley tells of having once seen a father grosbeak distribute a whole mouthful of green measuring worms to his youngsters and the next time he came back from the garden, bringing one raspberry in his bill and coughing up three more, to be thrust clear into the wide-spread hungry beaks of the babes.**

**The grosbeak's far from discipline is built upon equal suffrage lines. One day the father does all the marketing for the family, while the mother sits near by, the next day the marketing is done by the father and the family while the father bird sings in the tree tops and preens his feathers, hunting up only one mouthful of food to every six or seven brought by the mother. "I have watched a good many bird families," said Mr. Finley, "but I never saw the work divided as it is in the grosbeak family. I have watched at some nests where the young are cared for almost entirely by the mother and have seen others where those duties were taken up largely by the father. Many times I have seen both parents work side by side in rearing a family, but the grosbeaks seem to have a way of dividing duties equally, alternating days of rest and labor, that is peculiarly their own."**

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