

the president and the secretary of which, we are proud to number among our fellow teachers. Take advantage of these facilities and I am sure you will soon become more interested in a subject which, for pupils in our day, had no existence.

In conclusion, I have tried to present this subject to you not from the standpoint of the faddist, but from the standpoint of one who believes that our primary schools, dealing as they do with the masses, must continue to fit our people for the affairs of every day life. At the same time I am convinced we can do much to train the future men and women of this province, that there is lying everywhere around them a means of creating a disposition to appreciate the sentiments of the poet who said:

“Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this, our life, to leap
From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With greatness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings.”

SOME BIRD HABITS.

BY NORMAN CRIDDLE, TREESBANK, MANITOBA.

Several years ago my brother Stuart drew my attention to some remarkable habits practised by the Killdeer Plover while endeavoring to preserve its eggs from enemies. He had observed that this bird, while sitting upon its eggs, when disturbed by a dog, would leave the nest and flutter along the ground as if badly injured, as many other birds are known to do, and so entice the dog away. But, if the danger came from a cow, or horse, the tactics were changed and the bird, with wings and feathers spread out, would run into the animal's face and so by startling it drive the intruder aside. In the former instance the

bird left its eggs while the dog was some distance away, but with cattle it waited until almost touched before moving, so that its sudden appearance was more startling.

It would, of course, be a fatal mistake were the latter method employed to drive away a dog, or coyote; while the former would prove useless as a means of preventing cattle from treading upon the eggs. Hence, two habits to gain the same end.

It might be asked how a bird had acquired so much wisdom in being able to distinguish between an enemy which would eat both bird and eggs if opportunity offered, and a generally harmless cow from which the only danger would be of accidentally treading upon the eggs. And also, how it had learned to employ methods of defence so totally different. I believe the answer is this. Before the advent of civilization the prairies were inhabited by countless numbers of buffaloes, while coyotes as well as foxes were also more numerous than they are to-day. The Killdeer is a bird that nests in open spots, usually on dry low hills not far removed from water. Consequently, the eggs and young would often come in contact with these mammals, and if the parent bird did not resort to some artifice, their offspring would often suffer. The parents which contended most successfully with enemies would naturally rear more young. Thus, by the "survival of the fittest" the instinct—I believe it is an instinct—has been acquired. I have observed these birds practise both methods with success when contending against crows, but man, they rank with coyote and dog and only feign injury. They consider—unfortunately rightly—that we are not to be trusted.

The American Goldfinch, often wrongly called Wild Canary, nests very late in the season, in spite of the fact that in some parts of the country, such as at Ottawa, it is a permanent resident. I remember puzzling over the reason of this late nesting until it occurred to me that the young were fed principally upon the seeds of wild sunflowers and similar plants such as Gaillardia, burdock, thistle, etc. Then the reason became plain: these birds waited until the seeds were ripe so that they would have an abundance of food both for their young and for themselves, during the breeding season. In Manitoba the sunflowers are much preferred, and I believe this is due partly to the birds' plumage harmonizing so remarkably with the flowers. Earlier in the season they feed to a large extent upon dandelions and Gaillardia seeds, both yellow-flowering plants.

At one of the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club excursions last spring, at which I had the pleasure of speaking, I made the rather loose statement that the American Cuckoos differed from the European species in that they reared their own young. While this is, generally speaking, true, the habit—as pointed out by Mr. Halkett*—is not quite so distinctive as my remarks might lead one to imagine. I have never personally found American Cuckoo eggs in the nests of other birds, though, I believe, there are records of such having been found. I have, however, on several occasions discovered more than the usual number of eggs in a nest, and in one instance found ten under one bird, which would indicate that at least three birds were responsible for them. Unfortunately the eggs were abandoned and consequently never hatched. There are also, I believe, instances on record of the European Cuckoo rearing its own young.

Writing of Cuckoos, brings me to a doubtful case of the same habit practised by the Redwinged Blackbird. The usual number of eggs is four or five, but on several occasions I have found nests containing six or eight, and once nine, which leads me to the belief that these might be from more than one bird. I am also suspicious as to whether the birds are not somewhat sociable in their nest-building operations. That is, whether more than one bird engages in building one nest. But this subject must be dropped for the present as not proven. I have introduced it in the hope that others might be able to throw light upon the matter.

The Mourning Dove has increased very largely within the last twenty years and in some respects is taking the place of the once abundant Passenger Pigeon, which it somewhat resembles in coloured markings. It seems well adapted to the changed conditions brought about by the ploughing up of the country. It delights to feed upon stubble fields or on waste land where weed seeds are plentiful, and seems rather partial to Green Foxtail (*Setaria viridis*), also not taking amiss to a good feed of wheat when opportunity offers. These birds often congregate in small flocks, sometimes several hundred being seen together, but they nest in solitary pairs. They are very fond of salt, like the domestic pigeon, and if they ever become too numerous could probably be captured by using salt as a bait. On examining the nests of doves at different times of the year, I have noticed the rather interesting fact that the nests are

*Ottawa Naturalist, Aug. 1908, page 95.

usually, if not always, more warmly built late in the season, doubtless to protect the eggs and young from cold, though I have no records tending to show that the habit is practised in the spring when the weather is often equally cold.

The young of the Osprey are said to have an inclination to hunt birds and mammals. Some naturalists claim that they are taught to abandon this habit by the parent birds, after which they devote their time to hunting fish. I am always rather skeptical about this "schooling" idea. It seems to me that a certain modern class of nature writers attribute altogether too much to this method of acquiring knowledge among wild animals. I have observed that young Marsh Hawks have much the same habits of differing from the adults in the matter of food. The young, as soon as they learn to catch for themselves, devote a large portion of their time to hunting young grouse which they destroy in considerable numbers. This habit only lasts about a month, after which small rodents form the bulk of their food supply, as is the case with the adults. The question is, do these young birds later find the grouse too strong and fast, and so are obliged of necessity to turn their attentions elsewhere; or are they taught by their parents that grouse hunting is bad for them? The question might be answered by another. If these hawks can capture grouse to advantage why should they leave them to seek other food of which a larger quantity would be required to appease their appetites?

There is no doubt, however, that parent birds do teach their young certain habits. I have watched both the Marsh and Swainson's Hawk teaching their young to catch the food that is brought to them. The old bird would soar above the young, which seemed keenly on the watch, and suddenly drop the food to be caught. If it were missed the parent would swoop gracefully down and secure it again before it had time to reach the ground, and the lesson was continued until one of the young accomplished the task. So we must admit the teaching of parents in wild life. The problem is where to draw the line between teaching, learning by experience, and instinct.

The 45th annual meeting of the Entomological Society of Ontario, will be held at the Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, on November 5th and 6th. Dr. E. P. Felt, New York State Entomologist will deliver the evening popular lecture. At the day sessions papers of economic and scientific interest will be read. Dr. James Fletcher is the retiring President.



Criddle, Norman. 1909. "Some Bird Habits." *The Ottawa naturalist* 22(8), 153–156.

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