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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Saturday, December 24, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FOR THE BIRDS' CHRISTMAS CAROL." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Office of Experiment Stations, United States Department of Agriculture. Publication offered: "Feeding Wildlife in Winter," Farmers' Bulletin 1783.

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You've often heard of that old custom of giving the birds a Christmas tree. In many north-European countries the birds' tree is a sheaf of grain raised on a pole. On the day before Christmas farm children put up the grain for the birds as religiously as our youngsters hang up their stockings.

Men in the Department of Agriculture's Biological Survey say that this old custom is an illustration of man's understanding of and response to the needs of wildlife. But they also say that in the United States the birds and other wild creatures need more than one little Christmas offering if they are to survive. They need well-planned and sustained feeding all during the severe weather when the leaves that offered them shelter and protection are gone, and when the insects, weed seeds, wild berries and other natural food are dead or covered with snow.

Mind you, the Survey men don't believe in putting wild creatures on the dole--feeding them so much the year around that they become completely dependent on man's charity. No, they believe that in the milk seasons birds should be at their business of helping the farmer destroy insect pests and weed seeds. But at this time of year--in midwinter wherever the deep snow has covered up all traces of food, then regular meals served so that the birds or other wildlife can get at it may save hundreds or thousands of lives.

In these days a good many farm families are interested in encouraging the native birds and other game to their property. Farmers may cultivate these wild creatures just because they like to have them around, or because they realize how economically value they can be. Whatever the reason, a good many people on northern farms now make a regular practice of providing winter shelter and food for their wild friends. You can read how this is done in a recent Farmer's Bulletin called "Feeding Wildlife in Winter," No. 1783, which is free to anyone while the supply lasts. You can get a copy simply by writing to the Department of Agriculture in Washington, C. C., and asking for it. Once again-- the name is "Feeding Wildlife in Winter," and the number is 1783.

Wisconsin is one of the States particularly interested in encouraging wild game--so interested, in fact, that at the Wisconsin Experiment Station scientists have been making a study of the food needs of birds and wild mammals in winter--what kind of food and how much they need. Pheasants, prairie chickens, Hungarian partridges, quail, squirrels and rabbits all showed a hearty preference for corn in this study. How much they need depends upon the animal. Pheasants and squirrels need the most food to keep alive and well, while quail need the least. The scientists report that for one week of severe winter weather, in addition to the wild food that may be picked up, a pheasant or squirrel needs 2 pounds of grain. A prairie chicken or

rabbit needs only 1 pound of grain. A Hungarian partridge only three-quarters of a pound, and a quail only half a pound. But none of these creatures is expensive to support on this basis. Taken together the figures show that to carry a good stand of game through the winter on an average Wisconsin farm, all you need to dedicate is a seventh acre of corn! Not very much to give your wild friends, is it? In fact, it's pretty cheap pay considering how valuable they may be to you.

The Wisconsin scientists tried out all sorts of grain to find which the birds, squirrels and rabbits preferred. Without exception corn got the biggest vote. When mixtures of grain were put out together, the corn was always eaten first. Next in preference was wheat and scratch feed, then buckwheat, barley, soybeans, oats and rye

The scientists found that one of the best ways to feed corn was to stick the ears on spikes driven through boards, or on poles mounted in the form of a platform high enough from the ground to be safely above snowdrifts. Many times well-intentioned people put out food for the birds which the birds can't use even if they are starving. All too often the food is covered with snow and sleet before the birds can reach it. Or it is put in a place exposed to the birds' enemies. Shocked corn left in the fields is a very helpful way of feeding birds in winter because the shocks ordinarily stand above the snowdrifts and even may offer some protection to the birds. Another very useful and inexpensive aid to wildlife is a load of manure spread on a field near bushes or other cover after each snowstorm. Birds will pick feed out of the manure until they can again reach other food. Of course, it's not always easy to spread manure when the snow is deep, but the deeper the snow, the hungrier the game.

The Wisconsin investigators report that some of the best cover for extreme winter weather is brushy marshes; brush piles or "down" tree tops with the leaves on; grapevine tangles; or young evergreen trees.

Don't forget about that interesting bulletin called "Feeding Wildlife in Winter," No. 1783. The youngsters in the family will enjoy reading it as much as the grown-ups. Write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for it.

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