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ORNITHOLOGY IN THE SCHOOLS

By WILSON TOUT

The solution of the bird protection problem can never be reached by courts, laws, or officers. The small boy is one of the chief offenders, and those in authority seldom attempt to cover or even reach his thoughtless acts of destruction. If all boys could be shown the harmful results of killing birds or destroying their nests, what an army for bird protection there would be within a few years. If the girls were taught the folly of pandering to the demands of fashion when it calls for the sacrifice of countless innocent victims, the game wardens now needed to protect our birds would have to seek some other vocation if they would still prosper. The school is the foundation of reform movements in other lines—why not in this?

In a former paper I gave the why and where; in this one I shall attempt to give the how and when of bird study.

The first objection offered to a proposal for having bird study in the schools is that the course is already crowded and no room remains for a new study. The objection would be rational if it were proposed to introduce a new study. Birds can not be studied from books and very few schools have access to mounted specimens. Saturday excursions, observations on the road to and from school, and in country schools, even at recess and during school hours, will furnish subjects for conversation lessons and also much needed material for language and composition work. One school I know of organized itself into a club for the study of birds. The children met at four o'clock twice a week and compared notes for about twenty minutes. This did not detract from school work but on the other hand increased the interest in the regular studies.

This paper was read at the second annual meeting of the Nebraska Ornithologists' Union, and is republished by permission of that Society.

Bird study should be begun as soon as the child begins to attend school. The seeming interest of the little tots in their reading and number lessons pales before the glow of wonder and enthusiasm as they tell of finding a bird's nest while on the way to school or hear the story of the birds from their teacher. Let a teacher mention finding a sparrow's nest and the school turns into an experience meeting; each little one having a story of his own to tell. In the country school this is especially true, as the pupils have a better chance to observe birds than the children of the cities.

I have had to work out my own plan of bird study in the schools, as I have never chanced to get another's plan. I have had some successes and some that were not successes, but from these experiences I have formed a plan that I believe overcomes most of the difficulties.

In primary grades social talks with the pupils is the best method. Let the pupils talk as much as possible. Take a single bird for a lesson and show a picture. By a judicious use of questions and statements bring out the distinguishing features of the bird you are studying. I have no patience with the teacher who asks such questions as: How many feet has a bird? What is its body covered with? How many eyes has a bird? What is a bird's nest for? etc. The dull pupil does not learn anything and the bright boy is disgusted. The pupils will tell about the habits, food, nesting places, eggs, call, etc., of the common birds.

If you are studying a woodpecker, call attention to the peculiarities that distinguish it from other birds; consider its stout, sharp bill, its peculiar feet, its short, stiff tail feathers, its habit of drumming, and its undulating flight. Tell the story of how one species of woodpecker got its red head and black and white dress, and have the pupils learn a verse or two from the many that are to be found in the readers and in teachers' journals. Before the interest lags close the period, always leaving something for the next lesson. At the next lesson, if during the right season, you will have several facts from pupils who have seen and observed a woodpecker during the interim. Never fail to treat of the good points of a bird and by a vote have it declared either a "good bird" worthy of protection or a "bad bird" deserving extermination. The teacher can mold the opinion of the school in accordance with established facts.

In the grammar and high school grades a different plan

works better. Here each pupil should have a note-book in which should be recorded his own observations. These should include the time of arrival, numbers, nesting, food, departure, acts of depredation, value to man, etc. Every note should be dated to be of value. In the course of a year the pupils will find several dead birds; these should be brought to school for specimens. *Shooting birds for specimens should not be tolerated.* Last year we had twenty-two birds brought to school for study. Among those brought alive were the barn owl, coot, horned grebe, meadowlark, barred owl, and flicker. Several different kinds of ducks were brought and a number of dead birds, among them a blackheaded grosbeak, golden-crowned warbler, Bohemian waxwing, downy woodpecker, and bittern. I mention these to show the actual possibilities in this line.

At the end of the year we made a table like this :

		Especially Valuable.	Nesting.	Summer Residents.	Winter Residents.	Permanent Residents.	Migrants.	Accidental.	
1. Barred Owl.....	Rare.....	..	×	..	..	×	..	..	Seen.
2. Baltimore Oriole.....	Common....	×	×	×	..	..	..	..	Seen.
3. Ruby-crowned Kinglet... ..	Uncommon..	..	..	..	×	..	..	..	Reported.
4. Bob-white.....	Common....	×	×	..	..	×	..	..	Seen.
5. Canada Goose	Common....	..	..	..	..	..	×	..	Seen.
6. Bohemian Waxwing.....	Common....	..	..	..	..	..	..	×	Seen.

The table needs but little explanation. A list is made from the notes of all of the pupils, but each marks his own. One pupil will see the northern shrike and mark it "seen," while another can only mark it "reported." No bird is put on the list without the approval of the teacher. Last year we had seventy-three birds on our list, and I can answer for every one of them.

Now I believe this to be true bird study and its utility and common sense are its defense. Only fifteen minutes twice a week was needed to keep the notes, and the time was not missed. An interest was aroused and the diversion from regular school work was pleasing. Many pupils reported an added pleasure in verifying their notes and observations during the summer vacation, and all voted for a continuation of the study during the present school year.

I have never taught a school where I did not have bird study, and I have never heard an objection. It is not a good

plan to announce the first day of school that you intend to introduce bird study. Such a course will arouse a storm of opposition. Start it very gradually after you have the school well under control and no one will suspect an innovation until you have the pupils converted and the patrons realize the value in the added interest of the children in their school work. *And remember that bird protection should be the keynote.*

The state laws protecting game and song birds should be discussed and better ones proposed. Spring shooting of migrants should be discouraged. Superstitions about birds should be exposed. Errors in popular ideas should be corrected. Prejudices should be overcome, but truth must prevail. A love of the birds must not blind one to the fact that some are destructive to the agricultural and horticultural interests of the state. A healthy sentiment in the schoolroom in favor of the birds will down the boy who shoots meadowlarks "just for fun," and he will be an outcast until he reforms.

I urge every member of the Audubon societies to think upon this matter and do something to encourage the study of birds in the schools. This is one of the objects for which the societies are founded, and yet I fear little has been done for the children of our public schools. Every year hundreds of boys and girls finish their studies and leave school, yet they know nothing of the value of birds. In their strivings to become real men and women they imitate the vices as well as the virtues of their elders and join the ranks of bird destroyers, the men for sport and pleasure, the women for decoration. As students of bird life and champions of bird protection our duty is plain. The school is the field and we are responsible for the harvest. What shall it be?

Information will be furnished regarding bird laws, bird charts, bird books for primary and advanced scholars, or bird study in schools, also method of organizing an Audubon Society by addressing

Leaflet No. 2
June, 1902

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