

WOODPECKERS AS SOURCE OF INSURANCE CLAIMS

By AUSTIN L. RAND
CHIEF CURATOR OF ZOOLOGY

RECENTLY a telephone call came to the Museum's Division of Birds from an insurance adjuster. An insured party was trying to recover for woodpecker damage to his home. The adjuster had not yet seen the house, but from the account he'd heard, it was badly damaged. The insured party, anticipating difficulty in collecting, was anxious to have woodpecker-damage coverage for next year. "What were the chances of continuing damage next year?" the adjuster wanted to know, "Will the parents and the young woodpeckers all come back and continue eating on the house until it's wrecked?"

Naturally, estimating insurance risks is out of our line but woodpecker habits are not; so we provided woodpecker information. Woodpeckers, properly speaking, do not eat

several holes in a row under the eaves right through the wall and the birds still had no nest.

As to the birds bringing their young back next year to the same house, that is contrary to woodpeckers' custom. When the young become full-grown and independent, sometime in the summer, they usually scatter out. Many live solitary lives all winter, when they chisel out sleeping homes for themselves. In the spring each pair of woodpeckers stakes out a territory for itself from which it excludes others of its kind.

It is not only by chiseling out wood that woodpeckers cause annoyance to house-holders, but the tapping they do on houses sometimes disturbs timid folks. One morning last spring a telephone call came from a worried lady whose baby was being kept awake by the drumming of a woodpecker outside the window. She wasn't at all satisfied by my assurance that the spring-time mating, of which the drumming was a part, would soon be over and that the woodpecker with a mate and young of his own would soon be too busy raising a family to indulge in noisy tapping on her roof.

FEARS HAVE LITTLE BASIS

Trouble from spring drumming on and chiseling into houses must be very rare and damage slight. If we lived farther west, out on the edge of the prairie, the story might be slightly different, but here about Chicago there are lots of trees for woodpeckers to work on. I wonder if most of the concern we hear about in the Museum is not over what damage woodpeckers *may* do rather than what they do cause. May it not be the concern of newcomers from the city to suburban and country areas over trespassers that they cannot control or order off and that they fear may cause damage?

The people who do have trouble with woodpeckers are the people who have to maintain electric light and telephone poles in certain districts. I've heard of trouble from woodpeckers in Florida, in Wisconsin, and in Pennsylvania, but know of it best in Florida, where the rural electrification project has put lines of poles along scantily wooded country and on the prairies. The stout poles evidently seem to the woodpeckers better for their homes than any of the nearby dead tree-trunks, and they chisel out their nest cavities in them. Only a shell of wood is left around the cavity to support the pole and wires when the winds blow and when linemen have to climb. The cost of pole-replacement is sometimes considerable, but fortunately the research on this problem has turned not to ways of exterminating woodpeckers but to ways of making the poles woodpecker-repellent. Up to date the research has not produced an economically feasible answer, but it is still going on. Perhaps it will provide a synthetic pole that woodpeckers can't use and so will leave more tall trees in the forest.

TRIBUTE TO E. E. HAND, SHELL COLLECTOR

By FRITZ HAAS
CURATOR OF LOWER INVERTEBRATES

IN 1937 a man whose influence upon the scientific exploration of the Chicago region was never duly known and appreciated passed away in Long Beach, California. Now, almost twenty years after his death, he has become newly and inseparably associated with this city's scientific endeavors.

Edwin Ellsworth Hand, the distinguished man of whom I write, was born in Centralia, Illinois, on June 3, 1862. He graduated from Shurtleff College, Upper Alton, Illinois, and became a teacher.

After serving as a school principal in Paducah, Kentucky, for some time, he came to Chicago where he taught, among other subjects, natural history at Wendell Phillips and Hyde Park high schools. During this Chicago period, Mr. Hand became an ardent student of malacology and collected in many Chicago-area localities that since have been swallowed by the ever-expanding city. He became a friend of James H. Ferriss of Joliet, Illinois, whose fine shell collection was turned over to Chicago Natural History Museum some years ago. With Ferriss, Hand made extensive collecting trips in the Joliet area as well as in the then almost unexplored western expanse of the United States. The fruits of these excursions are preserved in Hand's collection.

In later life, Mr. Hand and his family moved to Long Beach, where a new phase of his malacological career began. Formerly he had restricted himself almost entirely to the collecting of land and fresh-water mollusks, but in California his interest turned to marine shells. Both alone and in the company of Herbert N. Lowe, also of Long Beach, Hand collected these abundantly. A trip to Cuba with D. L. Emory of St. Petersburg, Florida, resulted in an excellent collection of shells and two short papers about them.

ADDED FOREIGN SPECIMENS

Not satisfied with his personal field-collecting activities, Mr. Hand also began to exchange shells with noted malacologists all over the world, notably with Philippe Dautzenberg of Paris. He thus added material from a wide range of foreign countries to his shell collection. He also often bought shells that attracted his attention, and as a result his collection is especially rich in perfect specimens of the

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Cartoon by Ruth Andris

wood but rather feed by chiseling into wood in search of wood-boring insects. They also excavate nest sites and sleeping places in solid wood, usually in a tree.

FINE EXAMPLES OF PERSISTENCY

It is extremely improbable that any house about Chicago would have insects enough in its walls to attract a woodpecker year after year. Any chiseling into houses would probably be for a nest or sleeping place. Woodpeckers have been known to drill holes through the walls of buildings, and a flicker once made a hole through the wall of a barn into the hay inside where it made its nest. But most times a hole through a wall would reveal a cavity quite unsuited for woodpeckers' use.

However, you can't count on a bird not doing something just because it's illogical. A pair of motmots, very distant relatives of the woodpeckers in Central America, drilled a hole through the mud wall of a house and came out into the house. Undismayed, the birds tried again and again until there were



Edwin E. Hand



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