

Le June

BLACK-HEADED GROSBEAK.

For several years, I have watched a pair of Grosbeaks that spend their summer on the side hill in a clump of trees. The pair, no doubt, has returned to the thicket for at least three or four years. It seems I can almost recognize the notes of their song.

Last year, we found three spotted eggs in a nest, loosely built among the leaves of the dog-wood limbs. When I had seen the father carrying a stick in his mouth, he dropped it and looked as uneasy as a boy, who had just been caught with his pockets full of stolen apples. This year, the nest was twenty feet down the hill from the old home. They came nearer the ground and placed the thin frame-work of their nest between the two upright forks of an arrow-wood bush. We had never bothered them very much with the camera, but when they put their home right down within four and a-half feet of the ground, it looked to me as if they wanted some pictures taken. It was too good a chance for us to miss.

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When I waded through the ferns and pressed aside the bushes, the nest was brim full. I stole up and looked in. The three bantlings were sound asleep. Neither parent happened to be near, so I crawled back and hid well down in the bushes twelve feet away. The father came in as silently as a shadow and rested on the nest edge. He was dressed like a prince, a jet black hat, black wings crossed with bars of white and the rich red-brown of his vest shading into lemon-yellow toward his tail. He crammed

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something in each wide-opened mouth, stretched at the end of a wiggling, quivering neck. The mother followed without a word and sat looking carefully about. She treated each bobbing head in the same way. Then, with head cocked on the side, she examined each baby, turning him gently with her head, and looked carefully to the needs of each one before departing.

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I loved to sit and watch the brilliant father as he perched at the very top of the fir. Early in the morning he showed the quality of his singing. Later in the day, it often lost finish. The notes sounded hard to get out, or as if he were practising; just running over the keys of an air that hung dim in his memory. But it was pleasing to hear him practise, the atmosphere was too lazy to call for perfect execution.

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The morning of July sixth, the three young birds left the nest, following their parents out into the limbs of the arrow-wood. They were not able to fly more than a few feet, but they knew how to perch and call for food. I never heard a more enticing dinner song, such a sweet, musical "tour-a-lee."

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The triplets were slightly different in size and strength. The eldest knew the note of alarm, and two or three times when he got real hungry, I heard him utter a shriek that brought father and mother in a hurry to get there before he was clear dead. Then, he flapped his wings and teased his father for a morsel. The minute his appetite was satisfied, he always took a nap. There was no worry on his mind, as to where the next bite was coming from. He just contracted into a fluffy ball, and he didn't pause a se-

cond on the border-land; it was so simple, his lids closed and it was done. He slept soundly too, for I patted his feathers and he didn't wake. But, at the flutter of wings, he awoke as suddenly as he dropped asleep.

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The parents fed their bantlings as much on berries as worms and insects. Once I saw the father distribute a whole mouthful of green measuring worms. The next time, he had visited a garden down the hillside, for he brought one raspberry in his bill and coughed up three more. Both parents soon got over their mad anxiety every time I looked at their birdlings. In fact, they soon seemed willing enough for me to share the bits from my own lunch, for the youngsters were very fond of pieces of cherry taken from a small stick twirled in the air above them.

X9
Nature has given the Grosbeak a large and powerful bill to crack seeds and hard kernels, but it seemed to me this would be rather an inconvenience, when it came to feeding children.

If it was, the parents did not show it. The mother always cocked her head to one side so her baby could easily grasp the morsel, and it was all so quickly done, that only the camera's eye could catch the way she did it. She slipped her bill clear into the youngsters mouth, and he took the bite as hurriedly as if he were afraid the mother would change her mind and give it to the next baby.

X10
After watching the Grosbeak family all day, we put the

children in a little isolated clump of bushes late in the afternoon, and when we paid our visit early the next morning, they were still there, but perched well up in the top limbs. We had at last reached almost a "bird in the hand" acquaintance with the parents. We could watch them at close range and they didn't seem to care a snap. The mother wore such a plain-colored dress, in comparison to her husband's almost gaudy suit. The male only wears the black cape.

X 11
The grosbeak family stayed about the thicket for over two weeks. The youngsters were able to find bugs and feed themselves, but each child knew it was easier to be fed than to go about looking under every twig and leaf. One juvenile flew up to the limb beside his father, quivering his wings and begging for a bite. His father, straightened back and looked at him with an air of inquiry, "why don't you hunt for yourself?" The little fellow turned his back as if in shame, but he kept on crying. The father flew into the next tree, the little beggar followed and squatted right beside him, as if he half expected a trouncing. I looked to see him get it. The father turned and fed him. He couldn't resist! In some ways all children are the same, and bird papas, perhaps, are a good deal like human papas.

X 12