

copy

## FAMILY CARES DIVIDED BY GROSBEAKS

The black-headed grosbeak is brilliant both in dress and song. I have sometimes found it difficult to distinguish the rollicking carol of this bird from those of the western robin and western tanager, so much alike are they.

The male grosbeak wears a distinctive black cap, a red-brown vest, black wings with white bars, and a fairly long black tail with white spots on the edges. His wife is more simply dressed with a brown and white striped head, a buffy body flecked with brown, and a light brown tail.

In the grosbeak family the cardinal or red-bird is perhaps best known, since he is so generally resident throughout the southern part of the country. The rose-breasted grosbeak is the species of the eastern states, while the black-headed grosbeak is a native of the West. The latter may be found anywhere from eastern Nebraska to California, and from British Columbia to the Mexican plateau.

As a rule, he builds a loosely constructed nest of twigs, sometimes so thin as to show glimpses of the sky through it. One day I stopped to catch sight of a bird that was caroling in a nearby tree. What I saw surprised me, a mother grosbeak singing her lullaby as she sat on her eggs. Few birds sing in the home. However much they wish to, they are afraid. Several times I have heard the black-headed grosbeak do it. How this bird took up such a custom I do not know, for all birds are cautious about attracting attention to the nest.

I have watched a good many bird families, but have never seen the work divided so fairly as in the grosbeak home. The first

day the father was feeding the children almost entirely. Whenever he brought a mouthful he hardly knew which one to feed first. The mother fed about once an hour, while he came every ten or fifteen minutes. This seemed rather contrary to the ordinary household. Generally the male is wilder and the mother has to take the responsibility.

The next day conditions were the same, but parental duties were just reversed. The mother was going and coming continually with food, while the father sat about in the tree-tops, sang and preened his feathers liesurely. He took the trouble to hunt up only one mouthful for his bairns to every sixth or seventh the mother brought.

The third day the father was the busy bird again. On the fourth the mother took charge of the feeding again, but she spent most of her time trying to coax the bantlings to launch out on their wings and follow her off into the bushes. It was hardly the father's day for getting the meals, but on the whole he fed as much as the mother.

At some nests the young are cared for almost entirely by the mother. In others these duties are taken up largely by the father. Many times both parents feed side by side. But the grosbeak seems to have a way of dividing duties equally and alternating with days of rest and labor.