

Irene took to Journal July 1-44  
" " 5 negatives

## THE NEWS BOYS' BIRDS

by

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Photographs by William L. Finley

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. A little boy stood at the door punching the bell. He was very much excited, his eyes round and worried. "Please, the English sparrows are fighting the swallows and going right into the bird house. Here's a baby bird I found under the tree. It's been pecked. Please come quick!" We did. The little boy was Robert Lind, the Journal carrier.

We walked out toward the white birch tree where the weather-beaten bird house hung about ten feet up. A pair of violet-green swallows were swinging about in big circles as if greatly distressed, their irridescent-green backs and snowy breasts gleaming in the sun. Somewhere in the thick leaves above, the angry chatter of an Englisher spit down upon us, berating us for butting into his private affairs. I suppose preventing the little cannibal from carrying out his murderous designs of pulling other peoples' children out of their warm beds, pecking them till they were all bloody and limp, and throwing them down below in a pathetic heap, was really interfering with the customary practices of a dirty little imported thug. "Ping" went a shot from the little twenty-two gun, sending a streaking shadow out of the tree faster than his wings had ever carried him before.

I looked at the bloody infant bird in my hand, hardly out of his pinfeathers. He had no tail. Whether it had been yanked out by the Englishers, we couldn't tell. His bare rump and back were bloody and mangled. It looked as if had been pummeled and pulled out tail first. He was limp, and it seemed to be curtains for him. I took him in the house, warmed a woolen cloth and put him to bed in a little box.

We stood off a little distance and watched to see if the swallows would go back to their nest and take care of other children inside. We didn't want to go up and investigate at the time, fearing that the swallows would think



it another invasion and we were in cahoots with the bully. They might not survive two such jolts, but give up all hope and leave the region.

This would have been a disappointment to us, for violet-green swallows had always been our most numerous bird tenants until this spring. We had always depended upon them, expected them the same as we did the sunshine and the green grass. The big bag of feathers had been got out and laid near the window in an upper room, ready to be floated out as soon as there was a chitter-<sup>and</sup>ing bird voice in the air. But there was none. The yard ~~in~~ the bird houses remained still and empty. Then one day several weeks later, we heard swallow voices in the back yard, and lo and behold, a pair had already ensconced themselves in a house hung on the tool shed, one that had never had swallows in before. They were evidently newcomers, for they were shy and didn't seem to know us. And there was no sign of an aluminum band on a leg. They were contented and busy rearing their brood.

A few days later, this pair of swallows that had just been mobbed by the English sparrows had come home to their old house under our windows. They had seemed glad to get back and the yard was filled with twittering again. Then this tragedy had happened under our eyes. A bunch of Englisher's had appeared earlier in the season, and we had invited them in no uncertain terms to be on their way, and had thought we were rid of them.

As we stood silently watching the winging swallows, at last one swung around and got up enough courage to drop in to the nest hole. But she jumped back as if scared at what she saw inside, or the memory of a bad dream, and she went back to her ceaseless floating in the air. Again and again this happened until we feared the pair would never go back to their nest. After about half an hour more, one bird finally lighted on the doorstep and staid a little longer, but she didn't feed. Maybe there was no one to feed. We waited. She came again and lingered at the door, pering inside. After a while she went inside and staid a minute or two. This happened several times, and we knew she was going to carry on.

In the morning we quietly investigated and found two fledglings inside



the box. With a flashlight we could make out that one was bruised some, but the other seemed intact. Swallow routine was proceeding as usual. But the little one that we had put to bed the night before was dead.

At the usual time in the afternoon, Robert Lind arrived with his Journal, and he brought with him two other paper carriers, Robert Mathews and Kay Penwarden, all interested in the swallow tragedy. It seems to be a pet hobby for all the newspaper boys to be interested in birds. They inspect all the yards and trees and tangles along their routes, and they know their birds because they have learned to go quietly. They get a chance to see the birds at close hand, the size, colorings, markings and songs. All of them are watching some special nests and young. They call them "their birds."

The boys are going to trade routes soon, Robert Mathews and Kay Penwarden sharing the Journal route in the Jennings Lodge district, and Robert Lind taking the Oregon City Enterprise. Kay Penwarden is a little older than the other two, and remembers some of the wild animal pets that lived at the Finley home some years ago,- Foxy the mule deer, Anty the antelope, Nannette the mountain goat, and especially Don Q the valley quail, that lived with us nearly nine years and used to visit schools and newspaper offices. He was a troubadour and used to go scurrying about thumping the black shoes under desks, but crooning sweetly to the tan shoes. Foxy the deer, used to visit the local school, walking serenely with the children into classes. They asked if they could have her for a mascot and were told she could be theirs if they would look after her and protect her. But when they mentioned it to the teacher, she declined the gift, remembering how much more interested in Foxy the children were than in their lessons. But birds that nest in their yards or on a bracket under their roofs are "their birds" anyway.