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HOW WILD FOLKS WEATHER THE WINTER

(These wildlife stories written by William L. Finley
and Ed F. Averill)

I settled myself deeper into the arm chair in front of the open fire and looked out over the Willamette. The conditions were a little unusual. All day the sky had been weighed down by the snow-filled air. Now the north wind drove around the corner of the house and souged through the firs on the hillside. With a roof over my head and the wood heaped high, I could spend a comfortable evening, but how about some of the poor unhoused folks of the wild who might shiver through the night?

This afternoon I watched the crows come trooping in silently and settle in the firs. They had been foraging. They were cold and hungry. Their very silence told of another bitter night in the firs. I felt a pang of pity for them.

A chickadee came flying over and lit in one of my Baldwin trees. How can such a tiny creature endure the storm? He seemed to have come some distance. Perhaps he like the crows had been out foraging all day. It was four o'clock and the day was going rapidly. He seemed to know it, for he stopped just long enough to turn around once and flitted down to an opening in a hollow limb. He disappeared so suddenly I was not sure where he went. I crept up close where I could look in, and there he sat. He looked up with an expression that clearly said he didn't care to be bothered, so I withdrew as quickly as possible, glad to know that one bird was safe in a warm bed.

After the robins had taken their supper on the back porch, they too, silently disappeared in the big firs at the back of the

house. The snow birds, song sparrows and towhees all quietly scattered, some going to the trees, some creeping into nooks and crevices about the woodshed, house and barn.

What a scampering through the trees the first morning after the ground was frozen and covered! Most of the natural food supply had been cut off. Chickadees and kinglets might get along all right. They hunt in the crannies of the bark, under the limbs, and in the foliage of the firs. But the juncos or snowbirds are of the earth. So are the song sparrows, the towhees and the meadowlarks. What of the robins, the flickers, and the quail?

Consider the birds, they sow not and they reap not, nor do they have storehouses. And yet they are fed-- not always-- here in Oregon, when we get a spell of weather like this. The

The little brown song sparrow is a close feathered friend that stays about our house all winter. He is well protected under the bushes in the garden, scratching among the leaves for insects, but depending for his meals largely on the little cafeteria filled with crumbs and bird seed at the window. When we have a bright sunny day even in the middle of winter, you can hear the brisk jingle of his song. If he is facing you, the blotch in the center of his breast and the brown lines at the sides of his throat tell you his name as well as his song.

The little Gairdner woodpecker, very much like the Downy of the East, is a permanent resident in winter as well as summer. The little scarlet patch on the nape of the neck always distinguishes the male from the female. She wears no such bright

color. One of these distinguished looking little males has his winter bed in our grape arbor and goes to sleep every afternoon about four-thirty. One of the cross-bars to the arbor is the trunk of a small maple. Hanging on the under side, the little woodpecker drilled a hole and dug out the heart of the cross-beam. From the under side no moisture could get into his bed.

Another bird of the woodpecker family is the red-breasted sapsucker that takes his living all winter from the bark of our shade trees. He cares nothing for the chunks of suet tied to the tree trunks. The tastes of the two birds differ radically. The little Downy depends largely upon the suet, but not so the sapsucker.

There is a reason for some people hating this brilliant little sapsucker, for during the winter and especially in early spring he bores little holes into the bark of our birch, mountain ash and apple trees. He seems to live from these little wells of sap. The beauty of the white birch clothing is marred and blackened. It looks like a disabled war veteran. The scars of the winter and spring heal in the summer. Instead of a glossy white coat, each birch about our home wears the marks of life's experience.

Another woodpecker is the flicker that has a bill like a pick-axe. His winter habits are much like those of the robin. The woodpecker foot is different. Instead of three toes in front and two behind, he has two in front and two behind. This enables him to walk up the side of a tree with ease. He often perches on a limb like a robin and is just as expert in landing on the lawn and digging out ant eggs and worms. When the ground is

frozen, he takes to suet.

It takes time to build up a bird patronage in the lunch counter business just as it does with any restaurant. Our winters are, ^{mild} as a rule, and bird food seems to be plentiful most of the season. The first winter we started a lunch counter we had few boarders. Birds passed by and seemed to pay no attention to the tables that were set. Later the news spread, and since then we have had a regular hotel. I am very sure some of the same birds return year after year, and so are regular patrons.

The chickadees generally order suet. The snowbirds or juncoes, song sparrows and towhees prefer seed. The varied thrushes and robins always like winter apples.

I was watching the other day and along came a bluejay and pitched into the suet. He jerked and tore at the shreds till a chunk the size of a walnut came loose. He took the whole thing without a word of thanks over to a limb of a big fir. He planted one foot on the chunk, hammered and pounded till his appetite was appeased. Then he tucked the rest of the suet away close in against the trunk of the tree for another meal.