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## BLUEBIRDS ARE THE HARBINGERS OF HAPPINESS

(These Wildlife Stories Written by William L. Finley,  
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Birds are often the happy companions of our work in the garden, and of our walks. Some are bold, others are shy. Shyness in birds as in people is often an indication of a finer nature. A dress rich in color, but not gaudy often proclaims the bird. A combination of color and song makes the bluebird a real aristocrat. He is one of our bird citizens that likes a modern bird house put up around one's home. Wherever he rents a house, he is sure to bring one happiness.

"When Nature made the bluebird she wished to propitiate both the sky and the earth, so she gave him the color of one on his back and the hue of the other on his breast, and ordained that his appearance in the spring should denote that the strife and war between these two elements was at an end. He is the peace harbinger; in him the celestial and terrestrial strike hands and are fast friends. He means the furrow and he means the warmth; he means all the soft, wooing influences of the spring on the one hand, and the retreating footsteps of winter on the other," wrote John Burroughs.

But Mr. Burroughs had in mind the bluebird at Riverby, his home on the Hudson. If he had written of the mountain bluebird, he could hardly have mentioned the earth, for the cloak of this bird is without a trace of earthy trimming. He revels in the high mountains. He lives from the roof of the Rockies across the stretch of high plateaus to the Cascades and the Sierras, and from the waters of the Yukon to the tablelands of Mexico.

Indeed, one of the first places where he was discovered was Great Bear Lake, far up in the northern end of our continent, and for a time he was known as the Arctic bluebird.

If we could turn back the pages of time to the place where bluebird annals began, we might discover the cause for the various styles in bluebird coats. The speckled breast of a young bluebird would indicate that he is a close relative of the thrushes. Yet the bluebird has departed from the earthy-brown of the thrushes and has come down the long trail of time in this showy coat of blue. But who can explain the causes for the different coloring in our three bluebirds? The bluebird of the East has the bright blue upper parts, with throat, breast and sides dull red. The bluebird of the Pacific Coast is cloaked in a dark purplish-blue tinged with chestnut, throat blue, rest of under parts chestnut, fading to gray on the belly. Between the eastern and the western cousins comes the bluebird of the mountains, painted with the richest turquoise blue on the head and back, and a lighter cerulean-blue on the abdomen. Perhaps the color of coats has some connection with the climate and food, but no one really knows the riddle of the bluebird's dress.

I have found a good deal of human interest in watching bluebirds in my orchard. In the mild Oregon climate the bluebirds are with us all year. Early in the spring I saw a pair flying about looking at my bird houses. They were here day after day examining three of them, but as the days wore on it seemed hard for them to decide just which one to take. They were looking at a house in each of the apple trees that bordered the roadway, and at another house in an apple tree in the front yard.

Finally one morning I saw them carrying straws into the tree in

the front yard, and was glad that they had selected this house. Yet the following morning, I saw them carrying straws into the house on the west side of the road. Then occasionally they would go and take a look into the third house. I suppose it is rather difficult for the birds to decide on housekeeping rooms just as it is for people. Each place has particular advantages and attractions.

At last the bluebirds centered all activities in the apple tree house on the west side of the road, and here the female soon had a setting of six eggs. When the young were about half grown, the bluebirds were quite tame, as the house was low in the tree where we could stand on a box and look into the doorway. One morning a little later, I noticed one of the young birds out of the house in the limbs of the apple tree, and soon the others followed. Both male and female had worked side by side feeding the birds in the nest, and now the whole flock was together around in the orchard.

About two weeks later when these young birds were able to hunt for themselves, I saw the bluebird parents again carrying straws. They were fixing up the home for a second brood. During the time the old birds were incubating, the young birds staid around accompanying their parents.

When the second brood was nearly grown, I noticed one of the children of the first brood carrying food into the house. He was apparently feeding his brothers and sisters of the second brood. Then one day I took the younger birds out of the house when they were about ready to leave home. The parents came and fed them readily as they sat on a limb beside the door.

Several times I saw the birds of the first brood carry food and poke it into the mouths of the younger birds. Once as the mother bird was about to feed a nestling, one of the grown young flew up to her and took the morsel from her, as if saying plainly, "Let me feed the children." And he did. Perhaps I should say "she," because perhaps this bird was a female and took readily to the care of children, even though she had never had any experience.

The whole scene was an interesting phase of bird life. Perhaps it does not happen in many bird families, yet I have known of it several times in the case of bluebirds, and the same behavior has been reported by other observers.