

Program 21 - HOUSES TO RENT - February 24, 1941
(How to Construct Bird Houses)

SOMETHING TO DO AND TALK ABOUT FIRST

It is none too early to paint bird houses and put them outdoors to weather. Birds do not like newly painted homes.

Make a list of birds that can be attracted to our homes by means of bird houses.

Discuss why it is necessary for the builder to know what kinds of homes birds select in their native haunts.

Ask Trailhitters to tell of their successes and failures in making bird homes.

How is a Trailhitter doing his bit for conservation when he builds and erects bird homes?

Do you think there is greater need now for us to provide homes for birds?

DO YOU KNOW THESE WORDS?

social

habitat

brood

LISTEN FOR THESE IDEAS

1. What features of construction must first be considered in making a bird house?
2. How do these differ for different birds? What size hole does the wren like? Bluebird? Chickadee? Does the location of the hole make any difference?
3. What birds like colony houses?
4. Is it important to know where and how high to erect the bird houses?
5. How can you help the robin?
6. What material does Ranger Mac suggest as the best?

SOMETHING TO DO AND TALK ABOUT LATER

1. Do bird houses around the home make home surroundings more attractive and interesting?
2. A man found that a wren made 400 trips a day to feed a brood. Do birds have an economic value?
3. What bird would you like best to have around your home?

Wisconsin School of the Air
Afield With Ranger Mac
February 24, 1941

HOMES TO RENT

Hello Boys and Girls:

The 209th anniversary of the birth of George Washington has come and gone. Because our Congress has been faced with the necessity of making some very important decisions, the words of wisdom of Washington and what he would have us do, have been on the lips of many people this last year. But there is another phase of Washington's life which we should know as Trailhitters. Washington kept a diary all his life. In this diary we find that at the age of sixteen he was surveying in the Shenandoah country, which at that time was the great west. He not only surveyed the land but estimated the amount of timber on the land. That is, he was a timber cruiser. Timber is bought and sold on the estimates of cruisers. Washington even at that early age, was able to do this with so much accuracy that people relied on his judgment. He surveyed timber lands, bought and sold lumber, much of which went to England, and he cruised timberlands for people who were buying and selling. He was accurate and painstaking in his map work and much of the surveying work and the corners to land that he placed way back in those early days are good to this very day.

When Washington was 30 years of age, he made plans for the cutting of timber from a large tract of land called the Dismal Swamp. His plans called for taking from the forest at each cutting only the amount of timber that the trees had grown since the last cutting. Let me explain just what I mean, because this is the very best forestry practice there is. Suppose you owned an acre of woodlot, and you found that that acre grew one cord of wood each year. Then you would take no more than one cord from

that acre if you cut each year. This is like having money in the bank and spending each year only the interest. Then you would always have the original amount in the bank working for you. That is good financing; and in case of your woodlot, that is excellent forestry. Washington's plans for the management of that forest are being followed to this day, and I understand that that tract of land is yielding trees to-day., just as it did back in Washington's time.

When you think that our vast tree resources were untouched in those days, you wonder at a man being so careful of trees. If we had followed Washington in his forestry practices, just as we have tried to do in his statesmanship, we should not have the great forestry problem on our hands to-day. When Washington was not leading an army, or guiding the nation's political affairs, he was planting trees on his estate at Mount Vernon, trees for beauty, shade, timber and fruit. Mount Vernon is a beautiful place to-day. The view of the Potomac River and the nation's capitol is wonderful, but the trees that Washington planted make the spot the delight of thousands of visitors each year.

If you want to do a thing, you must learn, first of all, how to do it. Just as that old negro mammy said: "You can no more do a thing without first learning how to do it, than you can come from a place where you haven't been." That may be true about people, but it is not true about birds. They are born educated. The robins that were born and reared last year, were never taught how to build nests, but upon their return to us this spring, they will build nests with all the skill of the older birds, and take care of their young as tho' they had had a course in "How to bring up bird children." Try as you might, you could not construct an oriole's nest, and yet

you have two hands , guided by a developed mind while a bird has only its claws and beak. Birds can construct their own nests better than we can, but there are certain birds that must have places in which to build their nests. There are plenty of crotches in trees for robins to place their nests, and plenty of waving branches for the orioles to fasten their nests; but there are many birds that do not build their nests that way; birds that must have holes in trees, fence posts, telephone poles and the like. But there are not enough of those holes about our farms these days. Many of the fence posts are made of iron, the telephone poles are creosoted, and we cut the hollow trees from our wood lots. There is no way of knowing, but I can imagine that many a bird that was aching to be a mother goes back to the southland each year without having ^{been} a mother because no place could be found to make a home. Here is the chance for you and me to help out by providing homes for these birds, places in which they can construct their nests. By doing this we bring these birds about our homes and farms, we have the joys of their songs, the color of their plumage; we can watch them in their daily habits. These are joys enough for the little time we might spend, but as another "thank you " they help us fight the most numerous and harmful enemy we have- the insects. Here is an opportunity for you to do a good stroke for conservation and at the same time help yourself to some of its benefits. And now is the time to do it, so that the homes may be made, put out doors and weathered, ready for these birds when they return from the southland.

When I say you can do this, I mean you- not a skilled carpenter or mechanic, but just the ordinary bird-lover who wants to build a house for the feathered friends.

Now let's make a list of the birds we can attract about our homes and farms by providing houses. Here is the list:

The bluebird, wren, chickadee, tufted titmouse, the nothatches, tree swallow, purple martin, flycatcher, flicker, red-headed woodpecker, hairy and downy woodpecker, sparrow hawk, the owls, and the starlings and English sparrows- if you want them. Then there are certain birds that like brackets. Among these are the robins, flycatchers, phoebes, swallows and mourning doves.

Suppose we mention now a few general facts that will help in the construction of these homes:-

First: Putting up bird houses is the best way to increase the bird population about your home and farm.

Second: Birds are not fussy about their homes. They want holes that are large enough but not so large as to admit enemies; holes that are correctly placed. Besides that, all they ask for is comfort and safety.

Third: Which way the houses face seems to make no difference just so long as the entrances are not facing the hot sun.

Fourth: Perches are not necessary.

Fifth: Roofs should be tight, not to admit rain and make the room drafty, but the bottom need not be.

Sixth: The houses should be ventilated by two small holes at each side near the roof under the eaves; but care must be taken not to make the room drafty.

Seventh: The entrance should be large enough to admit the bird, placed in general near the top, in front.

Eight: The room should be large enough to be comfortable for the bird. For instance: a wren likes a room that is about 4 inches wide and long and about 6 inches deep, while a red-headed woodpecker likes a room that is about 6 inches each way and about 12 inches deep. A chickadee likes a room about like that of a wren but much deeper, about 10 inches deep, with the hole near the top.

Ninth: Wood is the best building material, and rough slabs with the bark on make artistic and good homes. By all means do not use tin cans unless they are put in shady places. Wrens have been found roasted in tincan houses.

Tenth: If paint is used, use a color that will blend in with the surroundings- soft brown, green or gray, but for martins, white or a light gray. After painting, put out doors to allow the smell of paint to disappear before the birds come back.

Eleventh: Make all joints tight to prevent drafts.

Twelveth: Placing the house the right height above the ground is very important. The right height for a wren house is 8 to 10 feet; a blue bird's house no more than 10 feet; a woodpecker's home about 20 feet; a martin's colony home no less than 15 feet and out in the open a chickadee's 10 to 15 feet above the ground.

Thirteenth: When cats are troublesome, use a tin guard around the tree or pole. Stray cats, homeless cats, poorly fed cats are among the bird's worst enemies. A well-fed home cat is bad enough.

Fourteenth: Some authorities state that houses should be so constructed that all filth and litter can be removed before the birds return in the spring. I suppose that this might be a good practice when English sparrows and squirrels take possession of a house, but otherwise, I do not believe it is. Who cleaned out the homes of birds before man put appearance on the scene? The birds did it themselves and always will. If boys and girls construct houses that are easily opened for cleaning purposes there is always a great temptation to look in to see how things are progressing with the bird family, and such a practice will drive the birds away.

These suggestions will give you some good pointers in the construction and placing of bird homes. Last week Ranger Mac met a mail carrier who stated that wrens build in so many of the mail boxes

on his route that this winter he has been constructing wren houses to put up near the mail boxes, hoping the wrens will occupy them instead of the mail boxes, and then it won't be necessary for him to interfere with the family life of so many birds on his route.

I suppose that the homes which birds like best are made of the material that they build in themselves- the trunk of a tree. You go out to the wood pile and find the branch or trunk of a tree that is 12 to 18 inches long- one that has rough bark on it. A cavity can be bored out or chisled out from the top and an entrance hole made; or the block of wood can be sawed in two lengthwise, the cavity chiseled out, making a room something like the shape of a bottle. Then the two pieces are nailed together again and an entrance made. I think that birds like these homes better than any other, and they don't cost you a cent to construct- just time and energy spent in workmanship.

There are other ways you can employ to attract birds about your homes along with erecting birdhouses. In summer birds have more difficulty in finding water than they do food. Many birds have to fly many miles to obtain water. So another way, and an easy way, to cultivate the friendship of birds is to make provisions for them in the way of drinking fountains and bathing places. Any boy or girl can make a watering place without any expense- just shallow basins sunk in the ground, with rough bottoms to prevent slipping, with water about one-half inch deep at the edge and gradually deepening to about two inches- for land birds will never go directly into deep water. Of course, such a watering place must be placed where the birds will be safe from cats.

Another way to attract birds about your home is to put out nesting material. This suggestion came to me one day when I saw a robin trying to pull the strings from the poles used for trawling

tomato vines. Materials that are appreciated by birds are: Pieces of string or yarn about 6 inches long, cotton, wool, silk, feathers, hair, excelsior. Put out a pan of mud for the robins, if the weather is dry. When swallows are building, get on the roof of your house and gradually let very light, fluffy feathers float into the air. It is great sport to watch the swallows catch the feathers and take them to their nests. If you use red, white and blue yarn, you can visit the nests later on and find out how well the birds used the material you put out for them.

Well, it is time to get back to our studies from this trip afield. It won't be long now before the woodpeckers will be pounding on dead trees.

The woodpecker pecks out a great many specks
of sawdust in building his hut;
His head works like a trigger to make that hole bigger;
He gets mad if his cutter doesn't cut.
He doesn't need the plans of great artisans,
But there's one thing that can rightly be said-
That whole excavation, needs this explanation-
He did it by using his head.

So that's the lesson of the woodpecker "He uses his head."

Good luck, and

May the great spirit, etc.