HOW WE CAN MAKE OUR GARDENS ATTRACTIVE TO THE BIRDS: BY G. R. SHORE

In planning the home grounds don't forget to provide for the birds. Trees, shrubs and hardy vines in abundance to nest, hunt and hide in and, if you can combine the ornamental with those that furnish food, all the better will the place suit the homemakers. Every spring they fly into our gardens on a tour of inspection and bright eyes take note of its possibilities. If the cat is missing, it will add to its attractiveness. You must decide which you want, birds or cats, for they cannot be combined in any possible way and have both alive.

A good many years ago we bought a place with a number of old apple trees on it. One that stood nearest the house was a fine large and sound tree, but it was a nuisance on the lawn, as the dropping leaves and apples made so much litter. It was used so much by the birds and being so near the house gave us such a good chance to watch them that we hated to part with it. We had the top taken off 18 or 20 feet from the ground and planted all around the large trunk roots of our common bittersweet. In a few years it completely covered the tree with a mass of beautiful foliage and quantities of the red berries make a bit of color during the winter.

The birds find shelter and nesting places in the old tree trunk, and it is not an uncommon thing to see twenty or thirty of them come from the tree each morning for their breakfast, which we have ready for them — crumbs, seed and suet near by.

Birds can endure much cold, if well fed, but unless we assist nature their winter cupboard is often bare. Never is hospitality so greedily received. Sweep away the snow on a cold morning and scatter seed and crumbs and you will soon have guests, who will show their appreciation of your bounty, and stay with you all through the year.

The wrens are so sociable that they build every year in boxes and nests made from dipper and bottle gourds within a few feet of our back door, and one box at the corner of a veranda that is used by us constantly in the summer. The wrens seeming perfectly at home will light on the chains of the porch swing and sing with delight.

For a few weeks in the fall we have the little ruby-crowned kinglets in the grape arbor and among the shrubs in a hardy border; they are so shy and silent that one has to watch for them.

A young cherry tree in the back of the garden furnishes food for the robins, and when
it is in bloom I have watched a rose-breasted grosbeak and its mate go over the tree with care, seeming to get something they liked from each blossom as the oriole does from the apple blossom.

If a place is large enough to have a few large trees, birds will stay the year round, especially if we study their wants and provide for them.

In our little place where we use vines in place of trees so that we may have the sun in the back garden for flowers, we still manage to have birds with us both summer and winter. From the back door to the end of the garden is a grape arbor and on the posts of it in winter we nail large pieces of rough suet, which are visited daily by blue jays, downy woodpeckers, nuthatches and chickadees all winter.

Sparrows usually live in peace with the other birds, though they try their best to take up their quarters in the wrens’ nests. If the opening is made the size of a quarter of a dollar it effectually bars out the sparrows.

Wrens like best to build in the gourds, but will take a box for their second nest, if it is good and handy. The boxes are easier to get than the gourds are to grow, as the season has to be a long one to mature them. They must be ripe, so that the shell is hard to make a good nest, and if taken down in winter, the same gourds will last several seasons.

The wrens and sparrows a few years ago fought a great battle for the place. Though the sparrows outnumbered the wrens, the wrens held their ground and since I seldom see any fighting among them. I have seen a wren drive away a red-headed woodpecker four times its size that ventured too near its prospective nesting place. They are great fighters, but they are such cheery little fellows that we would greatly miss them if they failed to make their appearance in the spring. Mulberry trees and fresh drinking water in a handy place are both strong attractions for the birds.

A bird lover in Detroit who owns a large tract of land a few miles out of the city is doing quite an extensive work in making shelters and comfortable winter quarters for wild birds of all kinds, in the hope of getting them to remain all winter. He employs a man all of the time in the work and will take a census Christmas Day to see how large a colony has been induced to test out a Michigan winter.

We will watch the experiment with interest, and judging from the success of our own efforts in a small way can see no reason why in time we may not have some places in this country that will compare favorably with the work of Germany in the care, protection and preservation of birds.

BIRD STUDY AT HOME

A TABLE for birds was once laid in the branches of a scraggly hazel bush that grew at the edge of a California redwood forest. This little bush was also close by the kitchen door of a little cottage where a woman spent the choice hours of early morn and eve, making sacrifices at the woman’s altar—the cook stove! These sacrifices were far from being penances, yet they prevented the walks into the woods that were so full of the bird life she so longed to study. So a table was spread with delicacies (from a bird’s point of view), and the problem of going to study the birds was happily solved by the birds coming singly and in flocks to be studied.

The first to arrive were the chickadees, who were also the first to venture upon the window sill and then upon the bit of bread in the hand and finally upon the outstretched hand that held no bread—but only friendship. The juncoes came next, trim, modest, black-capped and with streaks of pure white in their tails. Then the noisy, brilliant blue jays came—both the Stellar and the Eastern—who generally demanded to be served first. Because of their valuable police duty such impertinences was tolerated. The varied robin overcame his fear and feasted warily but often upon the dainties set for him. The spurred towhee, forsaking his custom of hunting on the ground, flew often to the table. The fox sparrow, who scratched with both feet at once in a funny, clever way, the ruby-crowned kinglet, the thrasher, the hermit thrush, came bowing, curtseying, singing, to this table constantly spread with bread, crumbs, grain, bits of meat, suet, bones, fruit and a shallow basin of water. So their shy, pretty ways, their changing coloring, their nesting habits, their call notes and songs were studied under the pleasantest conditions and in the nicest of places—one’s own dooryard. And as soon as their children could fly they were brought and instructed in the delights and safety of this happy hunting ground.