MOVING BIRD NESTS SUCCESSFULLY

By MRS. STERLING. H. CROSS

My husband, who is a foreman on a road construction crew for the Columbia County Highway Commission, has had to either destroy or move two bird nests, which were in the way of constructing a road. Many people believe that a bird’s nest must never be touched or the parent birds will desert the eggs or young whichever the case may be. In my husband’s case this was not so.

This is what happened: Sterle (my husband) was directing the stripping of a gravel pit using heavy tractors and scrapers to remove the sod. He noticed a pair of field sparrows going to and from a certain spot which would soon be in line for scraping the soil from the pit. Upon investigation he discovered a nest containing three baby field sparrows still in the downy stage. Taking a spade and selecting a spot a safe distance from the pit he dug out a round piece of sod approximately a foot in diameter. Then going slowly to the nest he dug a like piece of sod containing the nest. This he carried very slowly and in plain sight of the parent birds, who were flying frantically around, to the first hole. Then slowly moved back to the pit here he could watch to see if the birds would find and accept the nest in its new location. At first the birds swooped near the old location then back to the new place as if trying to realize what had happened to the nest and their three young. After about a half hour Sterle noticed one parent pick up an insect or worm and circle over the new location a few times. Then it dropped down and fed the young birds. After that, much to his relief and satisfaction both birds accepted the new home and in due time they reared their young to maturity.

The second instance was a robin who had a nest with four eggs, which she was incubating. The nest was in a crotch of a tree that stood in the right-of-way on a county road, and would have to be taken out. Sterle selected a tree about fifteen feet away, near a fence, which had a crotch about the same height from the ground as the nest was in the tree where the robin was setting. As he neared the nest the robin flew out and scolded continuously only a few feet away from him. Sterle carefully and very slowly removed the nest, and again holding the nest in plain sight as with the field sparrows, he walked over to the tree previously selected and carefully wedged the nest securely into the crotch of this tree. The female robin remained close to him through all of this procedure. He then left the nest and went back to the road where the men of the crew were preparing to pull the old tree out with heavy and very noisy machinery. Sterle watched the robin to see if she would go to her nest. In less than fifteen minutes she had settled on the eggs as if nothing had happened. Even the men and machinery, so close by, failed to upset her motherly instinct to hatch her eggs and rear her young.

Moving nests of birds may not always prove as successful, very likely depending upon the species and temperament of birds, but it is worth a try rather than to destroy the nest by necessity. Moving slowly and quietly and keeping the nest in plain sight of the parent birds seems to help them to understand that you are not trying to harm the nest, but to help them.