



Photo by Doug Gilroy

Photographing Fun With Flickers

By Doug Gilroy

LAST YEAR the Flickers in this district had a tough time of it. Almost as soon as a nest was excavated a Starling took possession of it and Mr. and Mrs. Flicker were obliged to sharpen up their chisellike bills and start all over again in another section of the woods. The result was that by midsummer a Flicker in these parts was quite a stranger.

This year, however, the story is just the opposite. Starlings were few and the Flicker enjoyed a very productive season. Many nesting holes were drilled, some high, some low.

Anyone wishing to photograph these woodpeckers naturally would search for a low nest, and so it was that I found a dandy, not more than four feet from the ground in an old maple tree. The buzzing noise that came from within told me it contained young birds.

Here were ideal conditions for colour pictures. So the camera was immediately set up three feet from the hole. Next the remote control was fastened to the camera and I retraced my steps about five feet. There I sat down with my back comfortably braced against a tree and awaited developments.

In less than five minutes the female appeared and flew directly to the nest, ignoring the camera entirely. As soon as her sharp claws touched the bark, two of the young appeared in the opening, clamouring for food. I pressed the remote control button and obtained a very nice shot. She ignored the flare of the flash bulb and began to feed her young as only a Flicker can.

I always live in fear that, as sure as shooting, the young will have the inside of its head drilled out, for as soon as its mouth is open, in flies the parent's bill—in and out several times—with trip-hammer speed and action.

After resetting the camera and another five-minute wait, the male appeared and carried out the same operations as the female. He, too, ignored the camera, and another nice shot was obtained. This was indeed luck. I stayed around for an hour during which time the young were fed several times, but with the exception of the first time, the feeding was always done by the male. This I've noticed on many occasions—the male seems to be much the harder worker. Even when the eggs are being incubated, and one taps on the tree, it is nearly always the male that flies out.

Getting all the adult pictures I wanted, I went over to the nest and by enlarging the hole slightly to get my hand in, I pulled out one of the buzzing youngsters. To my surprise this fellow had a large scab covering the entire side of its face. Its eye was completely obscured. Its bill was twisted in the same manner as that of a crossbill. Perhaps that trip-hammer action of a parent's bill struck him in the eye when he failed to "open up" soon enough.

Later visits showed that his face was healing nicely and his eye was not going to be blind. His bill was getting straighter too. Here is hoping that by the time he reaches maturity it will be straight and strong, so that he too will be able to take his place with other healthy Flickers and thrill us with his drumming and hammering for many springs to come.