

For many years I have never been without a wild bird pet. Scores of dead and injured birds are brought to me, usually by school children. For three years I kept a Cedar Waxwing, brought to me while quite young, with a slight deformity of one wing. It ate out of my hand and perched on my finger as I carried it around and let it pick flies off the verandah screens. Its main diet was currants but it was very fond of ant eggs and bread soaked in milk. The appearance of the milk bottle always brought a flutter of wings and the bird twittered in great excitement. I found however, that too much of this diet ruined the birds' plumage and had to disregard his daily clamor for it.

Late in the fall of 1940, while out shooting, I picked up a young female Song Sparrow that had one wing somewhat awry. This bird was tame from the start and lived in perfect health on a diet of weed seeds. One day the following summer I noticed its water dish was dry and filled it. In a few minutes the little fellow fell on its back with wings fluttering and died in a few minutes. I never could figure that out.

A Mourning Dove is now enjoying his third year as my guest and it looks as though he would be my pensioner for life. He came to me late in the year with a slightly injured wing. When I tried to let him go the following spring, he flew head first into a tree and I found that he could only fly in a small circle and returned him to his cage. I cannot detect anything wrong with his wings and have no idea why he has never been able to fly properly. Screenings are entirely to his taste and all spring and summer his mournful song can be heard around the place.

This summer for six weeks, I doctored a Yellow-headed Blackbird which had a bad scalp wound and flesh torn off the shoulder of one wing. He ate wheat, oats and bread crumbs but never showed any disposition to be friendly. When I let him go, he soared several hundred feet into the air and flew away entirely ungrateful for my ministrations.

On April last, two girls brought me a beautiful male Purple Finch. As far as I could see, he was uninjured but thoroughly exhausted. They had picked him up with wings lying outstretched on the road. He proved so tame from the start that I have kept him ever since and not once has he shown any desire to leave his cage. A seed and fruit eating bird, he is easily fed. Canary Bird Seed forms his main diet, supplemented by figs, apples, dates and grapes. I tried him with all sorts of green stuff from the garden but he would have none of it, until I offered him chickweed which proved much to his taste. He has a beautiful wine-colored head, breast, and rump with a general overwash of the same color.

Birds sing very little after the nesting season, but this Finch, his normal conduct changed by cage life, sings almost all day long. Any unusual noise will set him going and he often breaks into song in the middle of the night if anyone stirs. He has a loud challenging song which is something like that of a Warbling Vireo, but for long periods he will warble a soft meditative refrain as though he were trying over a new tune. His loud song is always uttered standing up, head held high, but when he gives himself over to softer melody, he sits low on the perch, a picture of complete contentment.

The secret of keeping wild birds successfully is to give them the sort of food they would eat in the wild state. Old birds are usually extremely hard to tame but young ones quickly lose all fear of human beings.