



Patience and Peanuts

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To win a chickadee's trust, one needs only peanuts . . . and patience.

There is infinite satisfaction in nursing a crippled wild thing back to health, enjoying its friendly companionship as it convalesces . . . but this is forced friendship. For real thrill, there is nothing to compare with the triumph of winning the free confidence of a bird in its natural wild state.

This is surprisingly easy to do, with the Black capped chickadee, while the wee sprite's charm makes it a most alluring subject on which to practice one's own wiles. Of course, one must be content with cupboard love from a chickadee or is their habit of frequenting the haunts of man, and following him about at his work in the bush, a sign they desire human companionship? Certainly, they soon reciprocate one's interest, demanding imperatively that notice be taken of their arrival, staying close while food is spread, and keeping up a running conversation meanwhile. They seem to enjoy any attempt to talk chickadee language back at them, and come

closer, sooner, if one mimics their notes.

And they do, heartwarming, remember to come back. My experience of feeding chickadees began six years ago. At first, until I realized they wanted meat instead of vegetables, I was disappointed that they would not come to the feeding tray; but when I put out suet and nutmeat slabs I had better success in attracting them. They found the free lunch hung from the veranda eave, followed it to the thermometer post in front of the kitchen window, and finally right against the pane of the kitchen storm window. Here we had a ringside seat to watch their pretty ways and varied personalities. The most engaging was a slim, smallish bird we later learned to know quite well.

The next August, to my surprise and delight, this chickadee squeaked at the window where she clung in futile search for the feeding tray. Disappointed, she left, and we saw no more till snow fell. Then, from three to six fed regularly, and we could stand with noses pressed to the inner window while their fathers pushed the storm sash six inches away. "Sweetheart" had less fear of people than the others, would fly less far and return more quickly when I went out to replenish the tray with nuts. As she got used to me, and ventured close, her mate would remonstrate with her about this foolhardiness, darting down in front of her when she flitted to a twig too close to me and driving her back into the tree.

I never saw one chickadee actually peck another, but if one flew forward in attack, the other always gave way. Yet a feeding bird was never attacked. If one had lit to feed, it apparently had right of way until it flew with its crumb of nut. Then another would alight on the feed tray. Only seldom, and then at extreme ends of the board tray, would two feed at the same time.

The third autumn, Sweetheart again announced their arrival by hollering at me from the tree by the window. That winter, I put the tray in the veranda and propped the door open after the snow got deep, the front path unused. Again, it was Sweetheart who first braved the confines of the screened porch and proved its safety to her mate. Then I would stand in a corner,

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