

BIRD WATCHING

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NOW that spring is here again and our birds have come back from their winter feeding grounds an early morning walk is bound to be interesting.

About two weeks ago I took such a walk and as I was passing a small poplar tree I saw in the branches about ten feet above me what I thought was a woodpecker, but a second look showed it to be a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

He was a very handsome fellow. I had a good look at him as he perched above me. I was able to study him for some time as he was not the least bit afraid of me.

He slipped up and down the branches, whipping over and underneath and tapped and investigated each limb for his breakfast. His red crest shone in the morning sun and the black and red patches on his throat glowed with health and vigour. He was truly a fine bird.

He seemed to be finding some kind of insects on the limbs of the poplar. I am sure these birds will do a lot of good in keeping down the harmful worms that infest our poplars every spring.

Farther on down the trail I was passing a small poplar bluff when I heard a vigorous rustling in the grass and dead leaves near by. I thought it must be a squirrel or some such animal to make so much noise. I was surprised to see, as I came near to the spot, two little sparrows fly a few feet away.

They were obviously a pair and probably hunting for a nesting place. I had a good look at them and after I got home I looked them up in my bird guide and found they were Canada birds or the White Throated Sparrows. It has occurred to me that I really do not know our sparrows even though I have lived among them all my life. We all know the well-known and beloved song of the Canada bird, but how many of us can say, "That's a White Throated Sparrow" by just looking at one.

A night or two later a bird began to sing in the trees just at my bed-

room window. I listened to his sweet canary-like warbling for some time and decided that it was a Song Sparrow, but again I had to turn to my guide book to get a description of this lovely little singer.

Each evening we listen to the Vesper Sparrows as they tune up and sing their evening song which is so carefree and gay, but if he wasn't singing I would hesitate before I could be sure it was the Vesper Sparrow.

Just last evening I could hear a bird singing down in the woods near the house. It was warm and still out and I felt sure a rain was coming. I did not recognize the bird by its song so down the trail I went with my bird guide in my hand.

The song came from the top of a tall poplar. I crept closer and closer to the singer as quietly as the dead leaves and underbrush would let me. The singing stopped so I stopped. I saw no movement, nor heard any sound of wings, but when he began to sing again he was in another tall poplar across the trail.

I quietly stole across the trail and finally stood under the tree where the singing came from, but could see nothing. The song would start softly and then gain in strength and clearness as it neared completion, ringing so free and clear that it seemed to make the whole bluff reverberate. Then silence again, and next I would hear him singing in a tree yards away and still had no sight of him.

By now it was getting dark and the mosquitoes were out in biting hordes so I came home. Who is this shy little singer?

I am determined I shall find out. I am also determined that I shall learn to know our sparrows not only by their lovely songs, but by their colors and habits as well.

Waterfowl species are among the greatest wildlife actors . . . Watch a mother duck or goose the next time you approach her nest . . . She will very likely do everything but stand on her head in an effort to distract you away from the eggs or downy young.