

## *A Sense of Humour*

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Birds are so constantly occupied in their daily striving to get food, to mate, and to raise a family, it is not often we see them take time out for sheer foolery. We may be amused at the way they meet the day's situation . . . . but it is our own sense of humour that is tickled by their reaction to a given situation, not that they find it funny themselves. For instance, the wren who could not get a twig into the hole of his nest box because it stuck out too far on each side of his mouth. He tried the one hole, and then the other hole, went back and tried all over again. Still the silly stick would not go through, nor let him go in with it. Finally after one frustrating try, he dropped the stick, and dived through the hole himself. Then came out and sang like crazy. "Cheers! I sure showed that old hole it could not keep me out!"

Nearer to real humour . . . . though it may have only been "safety first" and not actual teasing . . . . (one could not see in the bird's mind) . . . . was the magpie who had three bits of frozen offal to feed from one winter. These bits of frozen carcass had been dragged near the house by a young pup, and the pup would charge savagely at anything that molested any one of them. The result was a merry-go-round, for the magpie would light on one, the pup would chase it, and grab the meat, only to find the magpie sitting on another chunk to which it had dodged. So the pup would stalk it there, make a last rush, grab his meat safely . . . and find the magpie sitting on the third piece.

This kept up for hours, till the magpie tired of what certainly seemed to be a game to it. Then it flew away to feed on the main section of the carcass, out in a field.

The other day I watched what I cannot interpret as anything but a mischievous sense of humour in a sparrow. Here the wren was the victim. The wren had carried a piece of material into the wee house in the caragana by my kitchen window; he had it so full now that while he was arranging things inside, his tail protruded through the side hole. A sparrow was hopping about the nearest branch, down onto the roof of the wren house and back to a lower lookout twig, peering down at that protruding tail. Finally he hopped surreptitiously back onto the roof, peeped over the edge two ways, chose a good grip with his feet, leaned over and pulled sharply on that wren's tail. Then he flipped over a couple of feet to another branch and preened the centre feathers of his breast, facing the wren's house as he did so.

The wren came out the exit hole fairly sizzling. But all he could see was a perfectly harmless sparrow, preening on a branch at the far side of the caragana. The wren remained bristling with rage for a few moments, then calmed down . . . it was hopeless to prove anything, so he swallowed the insult quite philosophically, to all appearances, and went ahead with the work in hand. But I didn't notice a protruding tail during the rest of that day's house building!