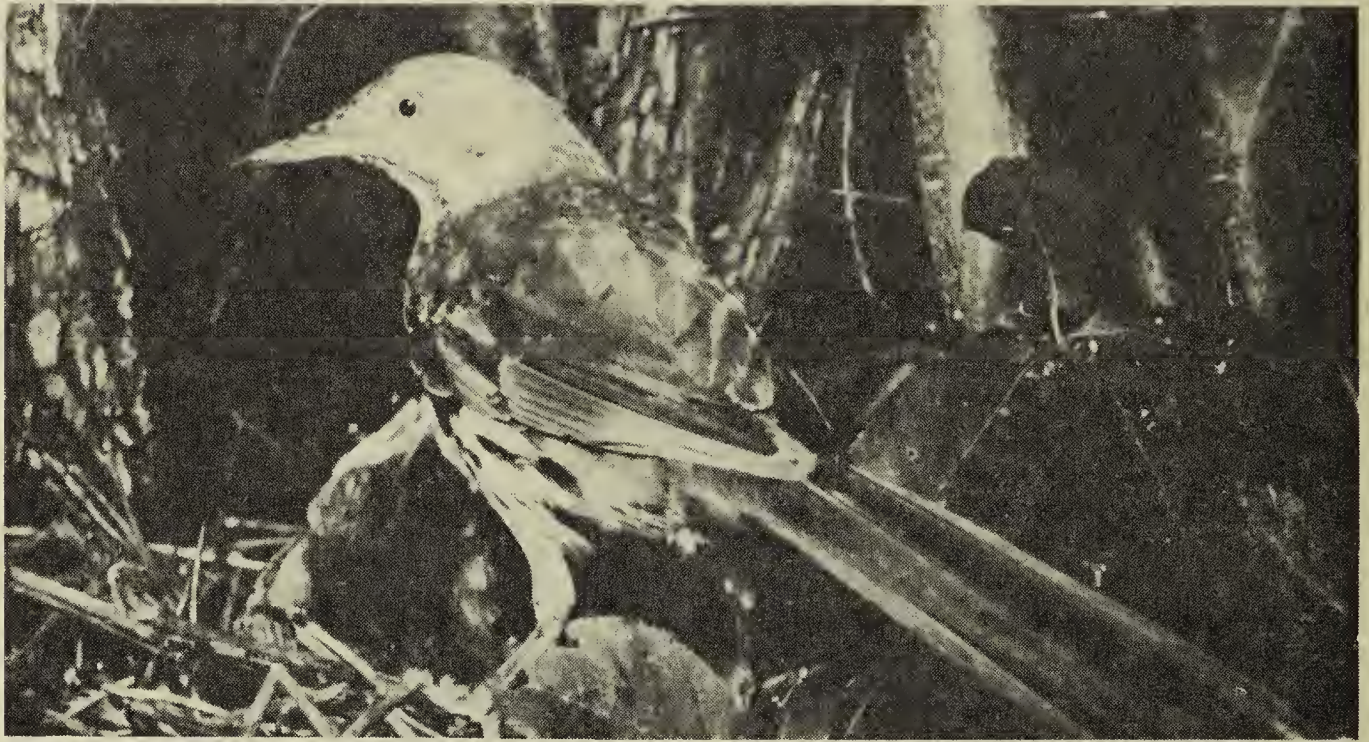


Will They Always Be Here?

By DOUG GILROY



The picture above is of a Brown Thrasher caught in a pose at the nest by the flash camera. Each year this rusty brown bird with the extra long tail comes back to the valley. In the early hours of morning and during the evening when the sun is sinking low he will fly to his perch in the top most branches of a favorite tree. Then loosening his feathers and drooping his wings he will throw back his head and pour out his soul in musical rhapsody.

While his song is a delight to the ear it is a most pleasing sight to see his bright form flash across an open space in the pasture and disappear into a green thicket.

Thrashers get their name, so the popular belief goes, from its habit of waving or thrashing its tail up and down. Another writer says in his opinion it is very properly named because the spunky bird gave him a sound thrashing when he investigated a nest too closely. I have found this vigorous action very typical of most nesting Thrashers. I have even had both male and female stand together over the nest and peck at my fingers as I move my hand towards them.

Usually we find the nest concealed in a thicket of Hawthorne or other low bushes and built two or three feet from the ground. On rarer occasions the nest might be found directly on the ground, but always well hidden of course.

There are other birds that return each year to the valley — the Catbird whose song is so similar to that of the Thrasher; the Willow Thrush whose beautiful melody possesses a resonant quality as if the singer was perched inside of a barrel; the bright yellow Warblers; the stately Great Blue Heron; the graceful Barn Swallow and many others.

What a cheerless and empty place the valley would be if some year these birds failed to return. I am sure that this will never happen, but at the same time maybe it could.

Not long ago Passenger Pigeons darkened the Prairie Sky; now there are none. As a boy I well remember flocks of Pinnated Grouse, now there are none. The Whooping Crane is almost gone.

The loss of extinct species might be turned into benefit, for these tragedies have taught us a valuable lesson. We know now if we wish future generations to witness and enjoy our wild birds, flowers and animals as we do today we must aim for greater conservational education. Abuse Nature and we lose it.