

the preen gland, has been observed to be an integral part of the sun-bath of many birds. Studies have also indicated, though not conclusively, that birds may gain some benefit at each preening from the involuntary ingestion, by swallowing, of oil, applied to the feathers during an earlier preening session, which may have absorbed some Vitamin D from the sun. It has also been suggested that exposure to the sun may assist the bird in ridding its plumage of ectoparasites.

Midwinter sun-bathing records are far less common in my files than those of the more temperate months of the year and I have no other observations recorded in the presence of snow, or at an air temperature as low as 39°F. (Elizabeth Cruickshank, pers. corresp.) It is often the unusual incident which gives new clues to an

understanding of behaviour, just as an expanding file of more commonplace records help to show a pattern which, in its own way, is important.

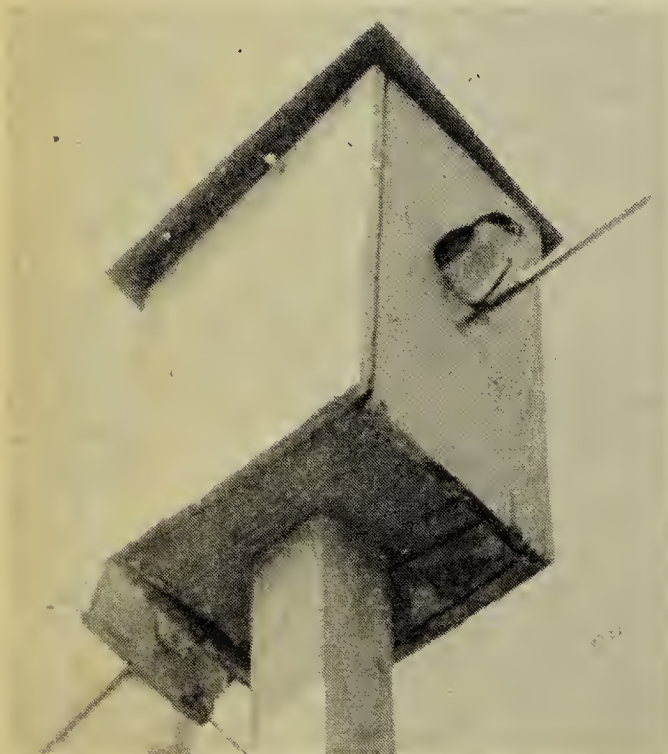
New species added to the list of sun-bathers, new locations and new postures, may all be important and helpful in defining the significance of sun-bathing in the life of the bird.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Doris C. Hauser (Mrs. Roscoe Hauser, Jr.) is an amateur ornithologist whose recent study on sun-bathing in birds (1957. *Wilson Bulletin* 69:78-90) has attracted considerable attention. Sun-bathing is a habit of birds which has been observed by nearly all who have an interest in watching birds, but there has been no previous extensive study of the subject. Still, the main basis of her research has been direct observations of birds in the field, an opportunity which is available to all of us. Her closing comments are appropriate: "The sun plays a vital part in the life-cycle of birds as it does for every living thing. It is hoped that this paper will draw attention to the subject and that observation and study of the effect of the sun on birds will follow."

## Observations of Nesting Tree Swallows

### THEY WILL NEVER COME

by Richard W. Fyfe, Great Whale River, Quebec



Our Tree Swallows' unpretentious home.

My title is quoted almost directly from the comment made by one of Saskatchewan's bird experts in reference to the situation I had chosen as a nesting site for Tree Swallows at my home in Regina. Of course, I naively asked "Why?" whereupon I received a most excellent answer



Approaching the nest box through a maze of power cables.

which made me wonder why I had ever dreamt of setting up a nesting box in such a location.

I had realized that I was a long distance from water. I had also seen that the birds would have to twist through a maze of power cables even to approach the site, and that they



"A bird in the hand . . ."

would be nesting along a busy thoroughfare dangerously near the clothes line and almost among the branches of a nearby tree. Yet, like so many people, I simply wanted wild birds in and about my noisy cluttered city yard and I was daring to hope that they would come.

At first the predictions of my friend seemed justified; my nest box attracted only the none-too-particular House Sparrows, which I went out at six o'clock on many a morning to trap in order to discourage them from returning. Then on June 6, when most swallows were half-way through their nesting season, the first pair of Tree Swallows arrived, and almost immediately set up housekeeping. This they have done annually for the past three years, and as the photos indicate, they have almost accepted us as members of the family.

Obviously the moral of the story is the old one—where there is a will there is a way! The important thing is the will and the patience to execute it. The most difficult for me was to stop thinking about nest boxes and get them up. Nest boxes should be well ventilated and easily cleaned, and protected from predators such as cats. If you have sparrow trouble, a good idea is to provide a trap door

which can be closed behind the unwelcome guests either to keep them out or to remove them from within. A few trappings will generally deter even the most persistent individuals.

## TREE SWALLOWS VERSUS HOUSE SPARROWS

by David Hatch, Oak Lake

During the spring and summer of 1960, I witnessed a struggle between several House Sparrows and Tree Swallows to claim the four nesting boxes around our farm home. House Sparrows, being very plentiful at Oak Lake, are very hard to keep under control. During the first part of the Tree Swallow nesting season, I had to clean each nesting box daily to remove the nest material deposited during the day by House Sparrows.

On one such visit to clean the nesting boxes on May 10, 1960, I was surprised to see upon removing the lid that inside was a live House Sparrow and a dead Tree Swallow. Both were females. The Tree Swallow which could not have been dead more than 30 minutes as it was still quite warm, had been severely picked around both eyes and its beak, the complete area being stained with blood. This swallow, wearing band number 26-84939, had been banded at Oak Lake on July 6, 1959, as a nesting adult female, and had returned safely from its wintering grounds only to be killed by a House Sparrow.

I examined eight Tree Swallow nests in 1960 of which four were presumably destroyed by House Sparrows. The fact that no House Wrens were ever seen at the nesting boxes frees wrens of any responsibility, but in all four nests each egg was punctured or slightly crushed. It didn't appear to matter how far advanced incubation was as the House Sparrows broke the eggs any time from the commencement of egg laying until seven days after incubation started.

At 2.00 p.m. on June 28, one particular nest contained three eggs and the adult Tree Swallows were in complete command of the nest. Twenty-four hours later all three eggs were broken and I caught a female House Sparrow within the