

poll, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, Rufous-sided Towhee, Baird's Sparrow, Slate-colored Junco, Tree Sparrow, Chipping

Sparrow, Clay-colored Sparrow, Harris Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln Sparrow, Song Sparrow.

FEEDING The Hungry

BY LAURA HOYTE*

I have always been interested in birds. Sometimes I used to throw out a few crumbs for them on a cold day, feeling that a full stomach would keep them warm the following night. I never ceased to marvel that a bird as small as a chickadee could survive 40-below weather, yet its cheerful song and acrobatic antics would make me think he was enjoying it.

In 1964, after we moved into a cottage on the edge of Pike Lake, I had more time to notice how many different types of birds there were around. Of course, the friendly little chickadees were present in numbers. I began feeding them, at first by hanging pieces of suet on branches of trees just outside the kitchen window, and putting little bits of bread or left-over pie, tarts, etc, in the crotch of a maple. (It wasn't a very good place, as the food kept falling in the snow.)

I especially remember having a piece of peach pie, along with a butter tart, completely consumed by one Robin. Being first up on the morning of January 2, I went to the window to see how many of our feathered friends were having breakfast. Just below the window on the walk was a robin which seemed to drag one wing a little. It looked so miserable I was sure it was hungry. Sure that it would never find the pie in the

tree, I tried to decide, while putting the kettle on for coffee, how I could get some food out to it without frightening it away. But by the time I was free to look again, I was surprised to see it in the tree eating the pie.

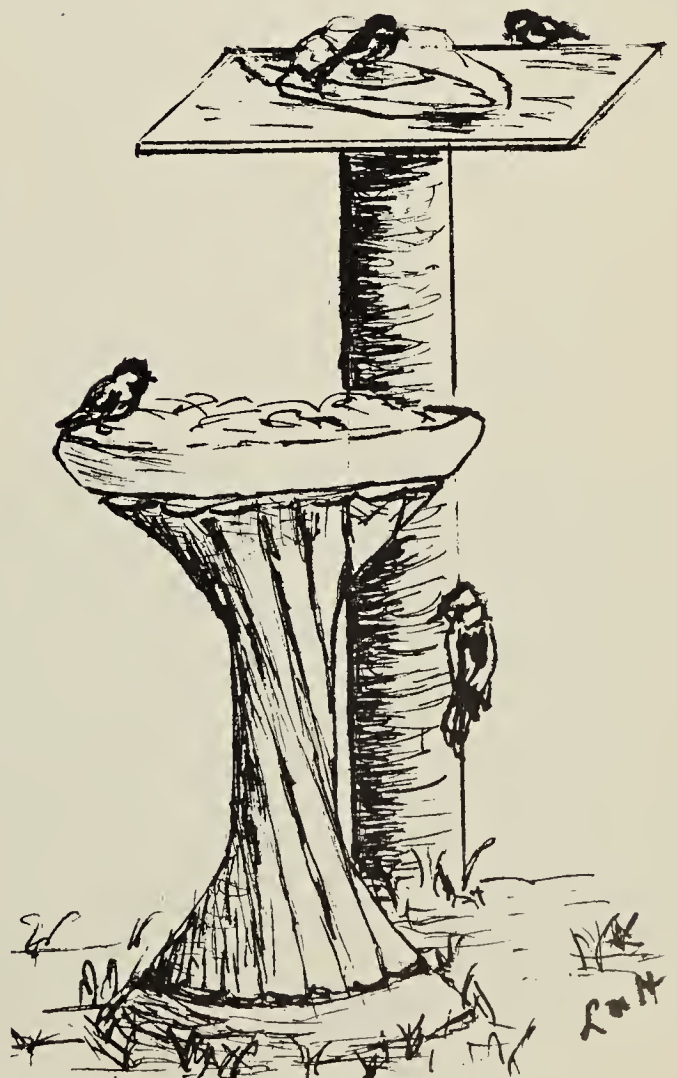
That day began sunny but cold. All day long the Robin ate, then flew to sit in the sunny doorway of the unoccupied doghouse which faced the south and was protected from the wind by a chokecherry bush. It was still eating there in the evening when it was almost too dark for me to see. It was there again the next morning. How early it had started, I didn't know but it seemed unable to stop eating. The weather turned bad later in the day and a blizzard was forecast. I called Janice, our daughter, home for holiday and I began to worry. Where could the Robin sleep out of the storm? We made a makeshift house out of an orange box and filled it with straw. Putting on our warm coats, we went out in the storm and fastened it to the chokecherry bush just above the doghouse where the Robin had perched when he wasn't eating or sitting in the doghouse. From what I know now, I am sure it was a waste of time. I don't think a Robin would ever go into a place like that. We even checked later with a flashlight, but we did not see the bird. The next morning it was not at the food tray, nor did it show up during the day. We did not see it again, and I always felt that it had eaten itself to death, although it could, of course, have perished in the storm. Since that time we have had as many as four Robins at our feed tray in January.

I had to find something better to hold the food. When we emptied the Christmas box of oranges, I took half the boards off one side, and nailed the other side to the trunk of the tree about 4 feet from the ground and just 6 feet from the kitchen window. From there I could

*Mrs. Laura Hoyte lives at Pike Lake, a small resort community 18 miles south-west of Saskatoon. Now a Provincial Park, Pike Lake is an oxbow, part of the ancient bed of the South Saskatchewan River. Set in sandy country, the lake is heavily treed on the north and west sides. Rich in bird life, it is probably the best single birding area adjacent to the city.

each new bird that came to the yard. To my surprise I learned that nearly 20 species of sparrows occur at one season or another at Pike Lake!

As more and more birds noticed the food and came to eat, my interest grew. The space provided soon became too small and we had to find other places to put food. Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers were now daily visitors to the suet, as many as six feeding at once. Grosbeaks and waxwings came but would not eat from the feeder; they ate the seeds of the Manitoba maple, chokecherries and other berries that stayed on the trees. In March and again in October up to 20 juncos fed regularly at our tray. In the winter Starlings occasionally dropped by. Chickadees were abundant. I actually counted 15 on one occasion, and I knew there were more in the nearby woods. We had a cement birdbath in the yard, which I filled with crumbs, different kinds of grain and suet. The Blue Jays had now joined the numbers of visitors and they and the



watch the goings and comings while I prepared meals and washed dishes.

Mr. Frank Roy, who teaches students at City Park Collegiate (which our two daughters attended), often stops by on bird expeditions to say hello as he, too, is interested in the birds that collect at the feeder. When he first came, I knew only the familiar birds and often asked him about different species I had seen. Knowing my interest, he and Dr. Bernie Gollop from the Canadian Wildlife Service send me cards to fill out each month for their records. I became more interested after I got books to identify

magpies carried away the bigger pieces of suet. It's quite a sight to see eight Blue Jays and eight magpies crowded around the feeders at one time.

At this point I must introduce our Samoyed dog, Nickie, since he plays a part in our story. He had figured out that I chased the magpies away but not the other birds and on days that he felt energetic he decided to chase them too. As he jumped and barked at them, one would lead him away while the others took the bread and suet from the feeder. Both Nickie and the magpies claim the uncleared wooded lot belonging to the Church across the road. While he is over there exploring, the magpies follow above from tree to tree, scolding all the while. One day a magpie flew off with a large piece of suet, almost too big to carry, so Nickie took off too. When the magpie dropped the suet half way across the church yard, Nickie retrieved it and started home. He always brings anything he finds to me in exchange for something tasty from the fridge. The magpie followed closely, as it wasn't

about to give up if there was a chance of retrieving its suet. Needless to say Nickie got his tasty exchange. There were days when Nickie gave up completely and lay at the end of the driveway, but the magpies proceeded to see how far they could go with him. They would pretend to find a good supply of food no less than 1-1/2 feet from his front feet or 2 inches from his tail but when he persistently looked off in the distance as if he didn't even know they were there, they finally gave up and went about their business.

I soon realized that I had to find a better way to secure the suet since too much of it was going to waste. Charles Kelman, of the Saskatoon Quick Freezer gave us all the suet we could use, most of it in large pieces. Joe, my husband, cut a big piece of plywood, 20" by 20", and we nailed it on a post beside the bird bath, securing the chunks of suet and fast with large nails.

In 1969 we had a lot of snow — one of those years when you never see a rabbit track anywhere and food was scarce



for the large birds of prey. The board with the suet would be quite visible to a hungry bird flying overhead. January 20 was a bright clear day. Just after lunch I went to let Nickie out and he began barking and looking at the suet board. I looked up and saw a large, dark bird with his back to me. Closing the door, I hurried to the window, calling Joe. The bird must have been very hungry because he stayed for several more bites even after the door was closed and the dog had barked. I wish I had glanced out the window before letting Nickie out, for we might have been able to watch it without disturbing it. Just as Joe got to the window, it flew up. The wing span appeared to be about 7 feet. We were not sure at this point what kind of a bird it was, and since it was flying away from us there was a good chance that we would never know. Then it turned, came back toward the house, and flew over the window from which we watched. Our hungry visitor was a Golden Eagle! Not likely in our lifetime will Joe and I ever again welcome such a rare bird to the feeding station.

Ruffed Grouse are permanent residents here; two to four stay the year round, and each summer they pass through the yard with their families. We have taught Nickie that they belong just as he does, so he simply lies and watches them. Mallard ducks come back each year too. We watch them swimming back and forth with their babies. I often see them on the grass at the edge of the lake, pruning themselves and basking in the sun. This fall Joe built a retaining wall

along the bank, leaving a space at each end with a gradual slope into the water so that the ducks can get onto the lawn to do their sunbathing. Last spring a pair roamed around the yard for a couple of days looking for a nesting place. They spent so much time in my flower bed I thought they had chosen it, but they moved on — leaving me to guess where they had built their nest.

Now each fall, in order to satisfy the crowd, we store up boxes of crumbs from the slicing machine at McGavin's Bakery. During the winter we serve up 9 cubic feet of bread crumbs. For the seedeaters we generally buy a bag of screening from Early Feed and Seed in Saskatoon. We were lucky enough 2 years ago to have a bushel bag of bird seed given to us by Jack McFaul of Saskatoon, who had grown it on his farm near Zealandia. We beg all the suet we can and cover the suet platform with fine chicken wire so that none goes to waste. We use about 20 pounds each winter. In addition, we use about 10 pounds of wheat, which appeals particularly to the Blue Jays. This is the first summer we have kept food out all the time and four Rufous-sided Towhees thought it such fun they remained all summer.

If you want to join in the fun, throw out a few crumbs, then hang up a few pieces of suet, and the first thing you know you will be caught up in the most interesting pastime you can imagine. You'll never know what you have been missing until you try it.



Red Fox Pups, Indian Head

Fred Lahrman