

ORIOLES - by Ethel Lloyd

With pleasurable jaunts by car likely to be only a memory this summer, our local surroundings will come into their own, and it is with the idea of pointing out the fun and interest to be had right in one's own back yard that these notes are being written.

For a number of years our family has taken a great interest in the orioles and considered it a privilege to provide them with nesting materials. So, at the end of May, we put out pieces of string and yarn of different lengths and colors, and bits of sheep wool, on the branches of the trees behind our bird-bath, as well as laying them alongside the bird-bath stand. Then we wait for the fun to begin. As a matter of fact, it is the more soberly clad Mrs. Oriole who does all the home building and weaves the deep swinging cradle for her babies. Her brilliant mate merely acts in an advisory capacity.

Two years ago our first customer came at noon and the noisy chatter of a male oriole had us dashing up from the dinner table. We spotted two orioles perched in the maples back of the bird bath. The male bird was pouring out constant warnings, and incessant alarm notes until he reduced his little wife to such a state of nerves she hardly dared to light on the edge of the stand and pick up the coveted material. Twice she came down and pecked at the string, and then dropped it in a mad rush to take cover at her lord's command. This pair of birds made numerous trips during the next few days, the male bird always remaining well hidden in the maples while his more daring mate would fly to the bath stand, hastily pick up a piece of white string and return with it streaming behind her to the safety of the trees. There she would neatly loop the string in her bill before carrying it to the home site. Her mate tagged along, each flight back and forth to the garden, and never ceased to give loud advice. Perhaps it was his choice that nothing but white string was used, for she was never seen to take any other.

Later another couple found the supply-yard, the male bird again acting in the same capacity as a noisy escort. His lady-love was much calmer, however, and paid scant attention to his ravings as she deliberately chose her materials. She was very fond of orange yarn and we later identified her nest by a tassel of orange wool waving from it! Rope fibres also intrigued this lady and she would tug strenuously at the strands to unravel them. The next lady that came also flew straight to the bird bath, so we concluded that the first one was a very timid bride who doted on her husband's every word, alarmist that he was!

This third lady took sheep's wool, rope and string, but no yarn. She decidedly did not like short pieces of string and any that were under ten inches were immediately dropped. Each piece was carefully looped up into a neat hank before being carried off. One warm day a very much harassed little female, to the dismay and surprise of her escort, suddenly dropped her hank of string, cast a longing glance at the cool water of the bird bath and stepped in for a refreshing dip. Then after a good splashing she flew up into the tree to preen her feathers while "friend hubby" alternately sulked and scolded in the shade of the leaves at this interruption to nest building.

This is but one charming example of the fun that can be had bird watching in even quite a small patch of garden.