

On being a farm wife - And other hazards Joyce Bupp



There are none so blind as those who do not see.

That thought summarizes my feeling of sadness for years lost in not pursuing an interest which has become very special to the Farmer and me. I sometimes feel regret at all that time missed in enjoyment of a special kind of natural beauty just outside the doorstep.

In the words of the youngest, we have become "birdbrains."

Rarely a week goes by that the

most used book in our farmhouse (excluding the checkbook, of course!) isn't yanked from the bookshelf and studied. And, since the searching hands often come direct from the grease, grime and dust of field machinery or gardening, our FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS EAST OF THE ROCKIES, by Roger Tory Peterson, is soiled and dog-eared from loving use.

Pursuit of this hobby has infil-

trated our every trip between house and barn, fieldwork, and pleasure jaunts. Sounds of an unfamiliar bird song or the flash of feathers not immediately identifiable after a constant challenge to learn more.

Sunday afternoon drives are invariably accompanied by two pairs of field glasses, Mr. Peterson's works, and a less dog-eared copy of BIRDS OF NORTH AMERICA. Rivers, lakes, parks, rural countryside, and our beloved meadow all offer abundant bird-life, just begging to be enjoyed for only the cost of our time.

An "I brake for birds" bumper sticker needs to go on our little car, not as a statement of philosophy, but a safety warning to other motorists. That has become glaringly apparent in the wake of increasingly frequent sightings along busy highways of such bird notables as hawks and ospreys.

We take great personal pleasure - despite that fact that we had nothing whatsoever to do with it - in the environmental accomplish-

ments that brought eagles back to the lower Susquehanna River and bluebirds and hawks into our own little meadow.

So we've made a move to give Mother Nature a helping hand.

Almost a year ago, the Farmer requested a bluebird house as a pattern to build a few more. Unable to lay hands on a bluebird house, I did pick up patterns and directions on building and locating them from our favorite local nature resource, Nixon County Park.

One chilly, late-winter Sunday afternoon, the Farmer disappeared into the shop with patterns and a supply of old odds-and-ends of barn lumber. Three hours and nineteen bluebird houses later, he ran out of raw materials.

Our Bluebird Trail is scattered pretty much from one end of the farm to the other, with a few of the houses visible from the back yard. Though sparrows promptly set up housekeeping in many of them,

bluebirds eventually claimed at least two.

Last summer, we took great pride in the raising of one offspring by a pair of red-tailed hawks, nested high up in the meadow woodlot's tallest oak tree. It was thrilling to hear the hatchling's calls, watch the adults soar over the meadow with snakes dangling from their talons, and later glimpse the youngster on practice flights.

Recently, I spied a red-tail perched on the fence which runs along the edge of the heifer's pasture down in the meadow. The large predator bird was quietly sitting, not far from one of the bluebird houses.

Maybe it was just coincidental. Maybe hawks don't even like bluebirds.

On the other hand, maybe we have a classic example of complicated environmental balance here in the making.

It is not uncommon for black snakes, I'm told, to slither up wooden fence posts, into bluebird houses, and prey upon the hatchlings.

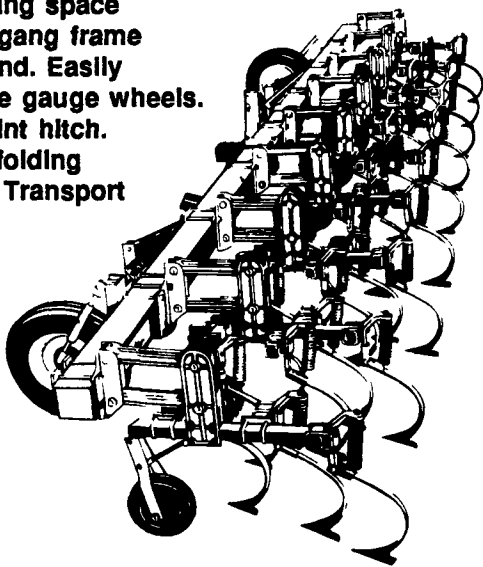
I prefer to think that the hawk was not selecting from a buffet of bluebirds, but merely waiting to snag a snake for supper.

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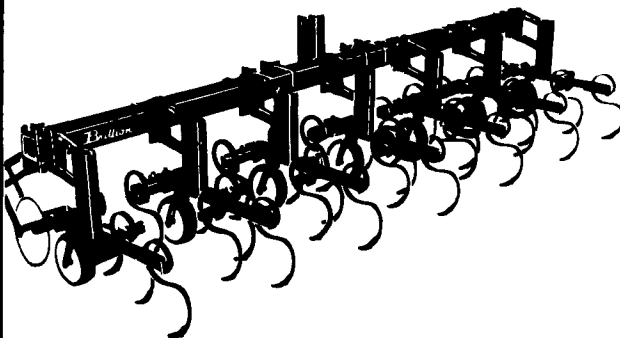
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