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THE BIRDS OF LADD'S POND

by

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"How they dislike the rush of vehicles, the rumbling of car lines, the smoke of factories, and the wooden and concrete structures that crowd out the trees and ponds. They enjoy open fields, meandering creeks, green hillsides: What is life if it lacks joy and contentment?" said Dr. Kellogg, Pastor of Baylor Street Methodist Church, as we roamed down the old trail with our cameras to Ladd's Pond.

"But you are referring to our feathered friends and not to our human neighbors," I replied as I pulled my field-glass from the case.

"Yes, bird life is not so different from human life," he replied. "Some get satisfaction in the city where it is often easier to pick up meals. The birds that I love are here in the outskirts of the city, and others in the country beyond. How will it be fifty years from now when this is a humming city? Our bird friends will have passed, and so will I," he said.

This was thirty-eight years ago when there lay before us a peaceful little pond on the edge of east Portland. It was a self-made shallow little body of water with its hem-line now in, now out, sedgy and careless-like, and with a bunch of cat-tails here and there. A bit of way up the slope some fir trees stood, they, too, pioneers of the place. Some would say there was nothing there to catch the glance of the eye, that it was disheveled and lonely, a forgotten corner. But wait. It is so still that it is ominous. The spring sunshine falls softly, creeps inside

of one, and soon you are aware that something is going on, an undertone of life, a personality in the picture. Yes, there were birds there that you had hushed by intrusion. And there might be other little fellows. This was Ladd's Pond, a part of an early farm by the same name.

It was neither forgotten nor lonely for it was the haunt of those who loved the birds, some old visitors, some young, some amateur bird students, some learned ones. The city itself was just growing up and a little countryfied, the kind where the school boy fidgeted for the last ball to ring so he could scamper for the woods,- or Ladd's Pond, perhaps to snatch a set of eggs from a busy bird mother.

And those who jotted down notes in boyhood days and were addicts of the out-of-doors are the ones who get the pictures of today to compare with those of yesterday. Glancing at one of my old note-books, I read as follows:

"June 5, 1894. After school I went out to Wade Pipe's home at Sunnyside. Then we strolled over to the woods near Ladd's Pond. In one of the fir trees on the west side Wade spied a nest about forty feet up on the limb of a tall fir. I climbed up above the nest on another limb. The bird flew off. It was a female Louisiana or western tanager. Started to slide out on my limb to see what the nest contained."

"Look out! That limb is going to break!" yelled Wade.

"I kept on hitching further out on the limb. In the nest were four pale bluish-green eggs spotted with brown. Wade had a collection of bird eggs and I knew he wanted a set of the tanager. I tied a rope as far out on the nest limb as possible

and then to the trunk of the nest tree. Wade stood shuddering far below and insisted on my coming down. Finally I got the limb sawed off. As I started to pull it in, it turned and nearly upset me as I tried to hang on to it. Two eggs dropped out. But at last I got the nest and the other two for Wade's collection.

A few years later when Herman T. Bohlman and I began hunting with a camera, this was the region where we shot many birds. In the bunches of cat-tails we found a colony of red-winged blackbirds nesting. As we approached the marsh and saw them clinging to the reeds, the males fluttered up to the fir limbs above. How their scarlet epaulets blazed out as their black wings spread, and what a gurgling ock-a-lee song.

One day as we were hunting through the marsh, we saw a strange little wader. It had a sort of yellowish bill with a black face and throat. Moving along cautiously to get a better view, it cackled to the right and then to the left without ever showing itself. It was quite a while before we could locate the nest made of dry grasses on a tussock in the marsh. The eggs were grayish marked with reddish-brown. Among all of the bird records for the past forty years, we do not know of any other Sora rail having been found around Portland.

In the grass at the edge of the pond was the home of the western yellow-throat, a shy little warbler that has a witchety-witchety song. Out near the end of a limb in a tall fir that still lives near the pond was the nest of a pine siskin. In a hole in another fir tree was where the Lewis woodpecker lived, and there were also several pairs of flickers in the neighboring trees. The latter is one bird that can take readily to city life

because it bores holes in telegraph poles and city residences.

Glancing again through my old note-book I came upon these jottings:

"June 12, 1901. In ^{an} ~~one of the~~ ^{hole} old flicker in a dead fir stump we found the nest of a Parkman's wren. Opening it, we got a surprise. In the nest were four eggs. Under this home was another nest containing three eggs and a dead wren. Evidently the mother bird had died. The male had brought another mate home and built a new nest on top of his old one. It was a queer method of burying his first wife."

The most unusual record of bird life that shows a change from forty years ago, and that can never occur again here, relates to one of our well known game birds.

"May 30, 1899. Sunny spring morning. Wandering on the slope of the hill on the north side of the pond, I met an old blue or sooty grouse. She was more excited than I. She ran along clucking with wings down. A nest somewhere. Then I saw two chicks following her. As I moved nearer, chicks scattered in all directions. They looked to be not more than two or three days old. The mother fluttered back with a warning cry and every baby darted into the leaves and grass, and were gone."

What a transformation in the old Ladd farm and its pond, at that time on the edge of east Portland. The region is now called Laurelhurst. The farm is a mass of city homes, concrete streets and side-walks. Many of the same old firs are still locking down at the modernized area. The old swamp has been completely cleared up and a landscaped lake has taken its place, with borders of domesticated plants and bushes, and flocks of tame birds. On

the surrounding lawns are tables and benches where people bring their picnic lunches and the children play.

This is now a real bird refuge. Hutchins and Canada geese have been imported. Tame pigeons come and go. And what a bunch of mallards! These are contented and like their city life. During nesting time they wander off into the gardens of surrounding homes. If there is a little goldfish pond, it is just what a mallard likes. He eats the fish and builds a nest in the back yard.

Instead of the sooty or blue grouse, one now may find the ring-necked or Chinese pheasant at home in Laurelhurst Park. As one loiters along the walks, he occasionally sees a hen pheasant feeding. Her nest is somewhere under the flowering bushes. Although these are game birds, they are safe from being shot within the city limits, but when the young are hatched it is a great hunting ground for the neighborhood cats instead of the sportsmen.