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THE BUSH-TIT

One can hardly help falling in love with the bush-tit. He is such a tiny bird, not larger than your thumb. He goes along in such a bustling, business-like way. He is quite fearless. One can make friends with the bush-tit as easily as with his cousin, the chickadee. Anyone who has studied bird character would know that the two are related even if he did not know that both are members of the Paridae family.

The bush-tit builds a real bird mansion, a long gourd-shaped home from eight to ten inches or even longer, with a round entrance at the upper end. Really the bush-tit does not follow our ideas of architecture, for he builds from the top down. He begins by making a roof to the home, then a round doorway and next weaves the walls of moss, fibres and lichens. From the doorway there is a sort of hall down to the main living room. This is warmly lined with feathers. To make a good feather lining requires a good deal of bunting. The feather lining is not really completed until after the eggs are laid. Whenever a bush-tit comes upon a feather, he picks it up and takes it home. He is like a person who builds a house but is not able to furnish it throughout, so he picks up the furnishings later on from time to time.

In some parts of Oregon where the moss hangs in long bunches to the limbs, the bush-tit uses this natural beginning for a nest. One of these birds built its home by getting inside of a long piece of moss and weaving this into the wall of the nest. Another bush-tit's nest was twenty inches long. The little

weavers had started their home on a limb and it was evidently not low enough to suit them, for they made a fibre strap ten inches long and then swung their gourd-shaped nest to that, letting the nest hang in a bunch of willow leaves.

Few people have any idea of the amount of insect food a bush-tit consumes until they watch a pair of these birds a few days after the eggs are hatched. Both birds feed in turn, and the turns average from five to ten minutes apart. The parents are busy from dawn until dark. They search the leaves and twigs, branches and trunk of every tree. They hunt through the bushes, grasses and ferns. They bring caterpillars, moths, daddy-long-legs, spiders, plant lice and many other kinds of insects. One pair of bush-tits about a locality means the destruction of a great many harmful insects. If we could but estimate the amount of insects destroyed by all the birds about any one locality, we should find it enormous. Without the help of these assistant gardeners, the bushes and trees would soon be leafless.

One can recognize the bush-tit by its plain gray body and long tail. After the breeding season, one family of young joins another and the flock hunts through the trees and bushes with constant chorus of lisping notes. Often they hang upside down like chickadees, as they hunt among the branches and leaves.