

How Birds Withstand WINTER'S BLASTS

By EDWARD B. CLARK

THE greater battalion of the army of the birds is in the southland for the winter. The warblers were the pioneers in the march to escape the cold. The naturalists of the world would give much to know what it was in the torrid time which told these faintest of the feathered creatures that they must be moving on.

There is a puzzle for the scientists even more complex than that offered by the spectacle of migration. It is to get the solution of the problem of why some birds with the recurring autumn invariably seek warmer climes while others apparently much more poorly fitted by nature to withstand cold weather conditions, stay about the familiar nesting scenes when the snow lies deep and the cold is like that of "St. Agnes Eve."

The titmouse, the Concord chickadee of Emerson, is a little feathered gem which looks as though a breath of cold would set it all a-shiver. Yet this little fellow sticks by his Northern friends all through the winter, when bigger, more heavily feathered, and apparently more hairy species have sought out the orange and the magnolia groves of the gulf. There are scores of other birds which remain with us to pipe a cheerful note over the snow wastes while their southern-flying friends are silent amid their congenial surroundings.

One of the most interesting bird studies is that which leads to a personal knowledge of how the feathered species care for themselves during a time when exposed man, even though heavily clothed, at times freezes to death. It is a question if many people know how the despised English sparrow, whom we always have with us, manages to pull through a Northern winter without offering himself up as a sacrifice to Jack Frost. It is a matter of current but mistaken belief among those who have noticed the great bulky nests which the sparrows have built in almost every tree that these bunches of straw, dried grass, and feathers form the abiding places of the sparrows during the coldwinter nights. As a matter of fact, a sparrow seldom goes near a tree nest in winter. If he has found a lodging for his summer home in a cornice of a building he may go there to sleep away the long, cold nights, but the tree nest is deserted from the moment the last brood is hatched.

If one wishes to know where thousands of the sparrows sleep in winter let him on some cold night take a stout club and rap with all his might upon an electric light pole that is fitted with an overhanging hood. There is a little platform in some of these hoods directly over the glass globe. Upon this as many sparrows as can conveniently crowd together roost throughout the cold winter nights. A club rapping experiment on an electric light pole at a Chicago avenue corner near the North Side water works lot during a howling blizzard one winter night resulted in the dislodgment of twelve frightened sparrows. They fluttered about in the storm and hung like so many fascinated moths. When the pounding ceased they made their way back to their resting place and doubtless remained undisturbed until morning. Their flat was certainly modern in its appointments, for it was heated and lighted by electricity.

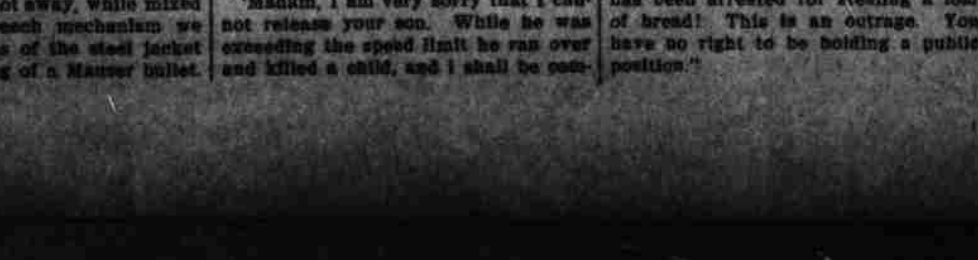
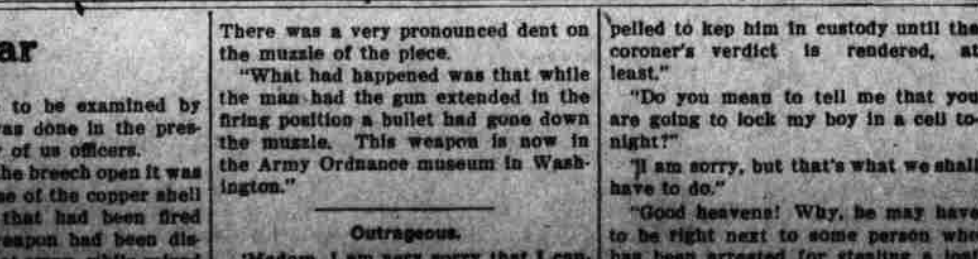
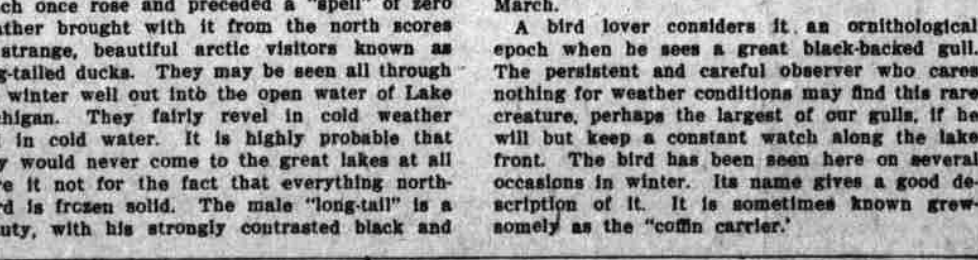
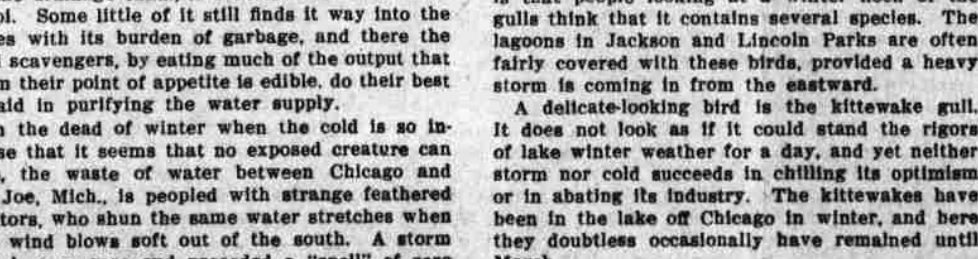
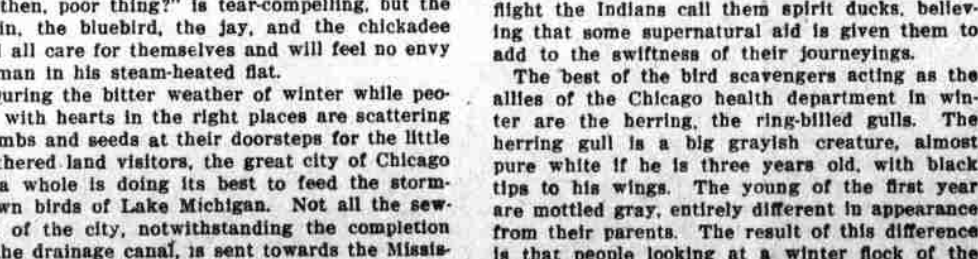
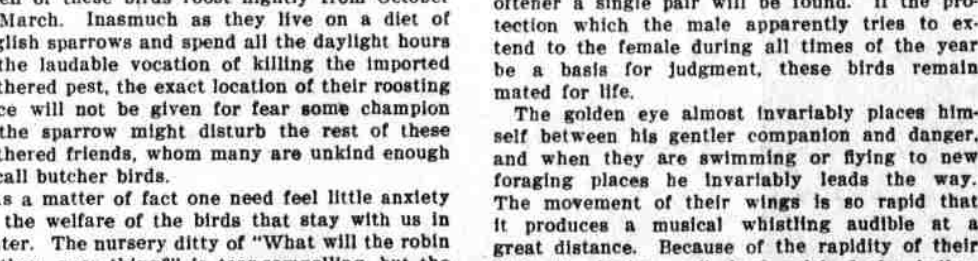
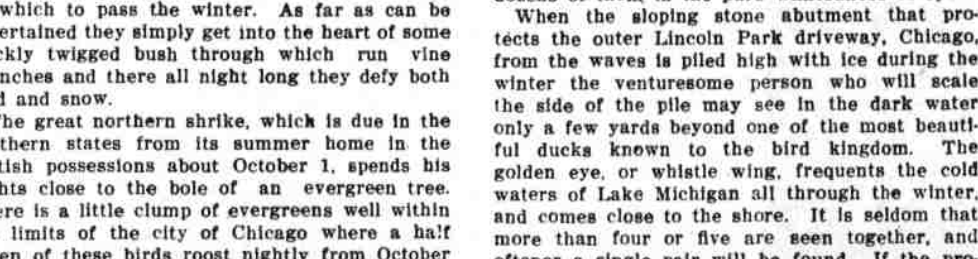
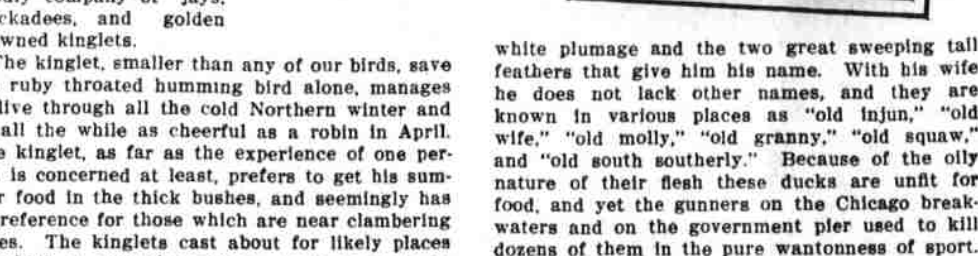
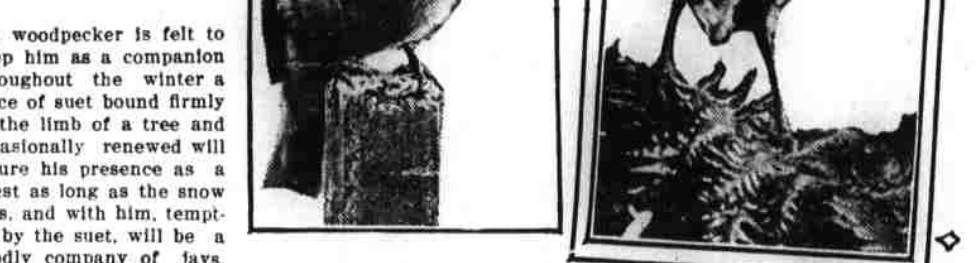
Take a trip through a thistle field in July and there will be seen scores of goldfinches feeding on the seeds of the prickly plants. These little creatures have the appearance of the birds of the tropics. It would seem that barely a breath of the north wind would send them scurrying southward. In truth, however, these birds, frail though they appear, stay with us all winter, yet not one person in fifty outside of the ranks of the bird students knows the fact.

In late August the goldfinch drops his gold and black livery and puts on a sober sparrowlike garb. This is the reason why people think that the little thistle seed lover has left them and that another bird has taken its place. In the Chicago Academy of Sciences there is pathetic evidence of how the goldfinch keeps warm during the winter nights. The curator has there an oriole's nest from the outside of which hangs the body of a goldfinch caught by the neck and literally hanged by one of the cords with which the oriole has fashioned its home. The goldfinch has sought refuge in the nest from the weather and on leaving it in the morning has thrust his head through the fatal noose. These birds utilize the deserted homes of all their brethren who build deep nests. The goldfinches return night after night to a nest which an oriole had swung from the tips of an elm in Western Springs, Ill.

The chickadee of which something has been said, builds its nest somewhat after the manner of the woodpecker, but if observation goes for much, the bird does not use this absolutely safe and warm retreat for its winter night lodgings. They have been started time after time just after sunset on cold nights from the vacated nests of many species of birds, the chickadee simply burying itself in the warm linings in which the summer before the young of its friends had been cradled.

By mid-September the swallows one and all had disappeared. It may be that if the appearance of one swallow does not make a summer, the absence of the entire tribe may not make an autumn, but it is certain that the birds must feel something that bids them begone, for they go in a body and they go in the twinkling of an eye. The swallows live upon insects, and there is no reason as far as food is concerned, why they should not stay at least two weeks longer, for their homes are in sheltered nooks. The humming birds, despite its delicacy, stays longer than the swallow and complains not.

If one can catch sight of a saucy little woodpecker going into a hole in a tree on his lawn at this season of the year he may hope to have an interesting neighbor during the entire winter. All the downy woodpeckers remain in the north the year through. Some of the red heads stay too, but most of them go a few scores of miles to the south. All of these birds that remain pass their nights in holes in trees, and at the time of the first fall month they are busy locating proper cold weather habitations. If enough interest in



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