

HOUSES FOR SONGSTERS

Some birds are like people; they are always on the lookout for modern houses. The bluebird, wren, violet-green swallow, and chickadee used to nest in crevices in stumps and in old woodpecker holes. Around the towns and cities the old stumps have disappeared. Fortunately many children have built bird houses and put them up in their gardens to rent for songs.

Birds have taken remarkably to civilization and to new style dwellings. A bird gets better protection in the backyard, and he knows it. He pays his rent in songs and protects the trees and bushes from destructive insects.

Although the bluebirds sometimes live in the city, they are more associated with country life. Farm houses are better than city flats. One of our friends in the country keeps fifteen or twenty bird houses about his farm. One old-fashioned square box is in the crotch of an apple tree. It has been there for many years, and is always rented by a pair of bluebirds. Since it has a removable top and is only four feet from the ground, the farmer and the bluebird are on intimate terms. He often pets the mother as she sits on her eggs.

This bird house is now covered with moss and lichens, and has become famous in bluebird history. It has been rented every year and it always produces two broods of bluebirds, and sometimes three. The record year was when the parents had two families of seven and one of five birds. Seven is a large family for bluebirds. It is remarkable that there ~~was~~ ^{was} seven in the second brood, and then a third brood.

In eight years there were one hundred and ten young bluebirds born in this old box in the apple tree. This might lead

one to think that the bird world would be over crowded with bluebirds, but it isn't. Song birds have so many enemies that our trees are never over populated.

A severe winter sometimes catches the bluebirds unaware. One season a bitter cold spell came early and all insect food was destroyed. Eight bluebirds had taken refuge in one of the bird houses. They were all frozen as stiff as dead leaves. They could have stood the cold if the food supply had not been cut short.

Last year a family of five young bluebirds was raised in a house by the study door. The parents and young were around the orchard for a couple of weeks. Then I saw the parents carrying in grasses to remodel the home. In a few days the mother was sitting on four more eggs. When these hatched all her time was taken up feeding the second family. Some of the older children had been staying around the house. One day I saw one of these birds bring some food, go into the house and feed the younger brothers and sisters. This happened time and again. The bird of the first brood must have been a female because she took so readily to housework.