

Coby

HUNTING WARBLERS WITH FIELD GLASSES AND CAMERA

Some people think that hunting warblers is like searching for the proverbial needle in the haystack. Yet if one has time, patience and a field glass, he can find seven kinds of warblers nesting in the environs of Portland. The reason the warblers are not commonly known is that they are small in size, keep pretty well hidden in the foliage of bushes and trees and fidget about actively hunting for insects.

The bird in this family most generally seen in summer is the yellow warbler because of its yellow coat. The Macgillivray's or mourning warbler is easily recognized because of the plain dark gray coloring on its head and upper breast and the yellow below. The yellow-throated warbler has a black mask across his face. If you see a warbler with its head striped with black and white, it has the name black-throated gray warbler.

A pair of black-throated gray warblers built a nest in the top of a sapling twelve feet from the ground. It was a little cup of grasses, feather-lined, nestled in the fork of a fir and in it were four eggs of a pinkish tinge, touched with dots of brown.

It showed a lack of discretion to try to take pictures of the little home during the days of incubation, but the feathered owners would probably have overlooked this had it not been for a pair of blue jays that buccaneered that patch of fir. While we were getting a picture, they eyed us curiously and sneak away among the dark firs squawking jay talk. Two days later, we skirted the clump to see if the warblers had been too severely shocked by the camera. The scattered remnants of the nest and the broken bits of shell told the story of the blue jay pirates.

But the warblers were not to be undone. They actually went to housekeeping again within forty yards of the old home site. The new nest was placed in a fir sapling very much like the first but better hidden from marauding blue jays. It was far better suited to the photographer. Just at the side of the new site was the sawed-off stump of an old fir upon which we climbed and aimed the camera straight into the nest. There, instead of four, were only two small nestlings.

The moment the mother returned and found us so dangerously near her brood, she was scared almost out of her senses. She fell from the top of the tree in a fluttering fit and caught quivering on the limb a foot from my hand. Involuntarily I reached to help her. Poor thing! She couldn't hold on but slipped through the branches and clutched my shoe. I never have seen such an exaggerated case of the chills or heard such a pitiful high-pitched note of pain.

I stooped to see what ailed her. What, both wings broken and unable to hold with her claws? She wavered to the ground like an autumn leaf. I leaped down, but she had limped under a bush and suddenly got well. Then I knew she was tricking me. My heart was hardened after that to her alluring ways and crocodile tears.