

UNUSUAL BEHAVIOR OF BARN SWALLOWS.

BY FLORENCE K. DALEY.

On the 15th of May, 1927, we travelled over mountain roads to our cabin in Frost Valley, at the foot of Slide Mountain, in the heart of the Southern Catskills.

On the following morning a pair of Barn Swallows attracted my attention, flying around the porch of "West Wind," darting under and out with such regularity that I watched them to determine, if possible, the reason for their actions.

For a number of seasons past a pair of Barn Swallows nested and raised their young in a disused barn, a hundred odd yards from our cabin, but it seemed improbable that they should choose to change their previous home site and consider our porch instead; this, however, was just what they were doing, as I learned through careful and constant observation.

On May 17, the corner-stone was laid, with mud gathered within my sight, and plastered under the eaves of the Westerly porch. They worked industriously for several days, and then upon the arrival of week-end guests, the home builders, disturbed by many strange noises stopped work.

When the guests left, the Swallows started another nest quite close to the original one, and directly over the window of our "pantry." Here they worked, until the second home was well on its way to completion, only again to be disturbed and disgusted by the arrival of other house guests. These Swallows were determined, optimistic and quite certain that their home was to be under the particular eaves selected, for when the above mentioned guests decided to leave, the Swallows started all over; choosing the third site (for luck) directly over the door and again high under the eaves. At this stage I decided that they should not again be disappointed; they had won my admiration and coöperation. The door was closed and bolted, so to remain until their young had left the nest.

The Swallows seemed to sense my protection because from that time, the excited, nervous twittering ceased for the soft low sweet notes that indicate a happy family. The nest was com-

pleted; the female settled down and quiet days followed. The male chose his perch two feet below and a foot to the left, and spent his time, for the most part, keeping his eyes on proceedings above. At approximately regular intervals he fluttered up and instantly the good wife was away for exercise and food while he "carried on." Their mutual devotion was something to wonder at.

When four youngsters were hatched the parent birds divided all household duties.

On the sixth day, I climbed a ladder, made the acquaintance of the tribe and banded them.

Then followed the time for photographs, but the nest was so close to the eaves that the negative showed nothing except the nest. I then decided to move the nest and young, down to a spot where it would be in a stronger light, yet firm and safe behind a wooden bracket, which, with others, had been placed there for a fishing rod rack. This was done successfully. The parent birds were not in evidence during the operation. When they returned and missed the nest, their behavior was most interesting, flying and clinging to the spot where it had been, even though their four youngsters were not more than two feet under them with mouths opened wide, calling for food. It was three or four minutes before discovery was made and harmony effected. Light, insufficient for speed to secure satisfactory negatives, decided me to take nest and fledglings into the open. They had no apparent objection and all snuggled down for a nap. At the click of the camera, however, two awoke to the fact that they had wings for a purpose and flew strongly into the orchard, across the road and into a thicket of shrubs and vines, parents following. We sought in vain for them, in the meantime, having replaced the nest containing the two left to me. Consider my astonishment when the parent birds returned to the nest and took up their usual routine of feeding, in spite of the incident which had been so exciting and disappointing to me.

That evening, at dusk, going out on inspection I found one parent Swallow watching over the two little ones. Hitherto, the pair had not been separated at night, perching side by side, on the ends of an old horseshoe I had earlier arranged for them, so I felt rather depressed.

For two days the two in the nest were regularly fed by both parents, but no signs of those others who had begun their adventure. At night, one parent only, would keep watch on its horseshoe perch. It was a help to feel that the other was also on guard.

On the third morning, I heard flutterings of wings with much twittering and hastened out to see four fledglings in the nest, being fed, and the parents fluttering over them. That night they sat side by side on their horseshoe and I was very happy.

Early the following morning the four flew away into the orchard with the adults. I confess that I rather forlornly turned away repeating to myself, "Let nothing make thee sad, fretful or too regretful."

That night I wandered out, from force of habit, I think, to the nest. A joyous surprise awaited me, for all four little ones were there sleeping peacefully and the parents on the horseshoe.

It is not the habit of Swallows to return to their nest and use it as a home—after having once left it—and this characteristic, if true, constitutes the unusual behavior of my particular family.

After July 16 the six of them left each morning and returned at dusk rarely varying the time, fifteen minutes around six o'clock.

During the early days of flight they remained sufficiently near to permit observation, flying strongly, resting at intervals on the peak of the cabin roof and being fed by the providers. At this period in their development I heard, one morning, an unusual twittering on the roof which proved to be caused by the arrival of five other fledglings (banded) all perched in a row on the easterly side of a center chimney while the "West Wind" crowd had chosen the western side from the first time they used the roof peak as a rendezvous. The entente was cordial, and the four adults had little time for anything else than supplying insects for nine hungry youngsters.

"Wildcat Mountain" is southerly from West Wind across the "Beautiful Neversink" and as I had banded the group of five inside a deserted cabin at the foot of the mountain, I identified them as "Wildcatters" from our West Wind product. As days passed and each evening saw the return of my four with their parents, it was very evident that one nest was not quite big enough to give what I considered comfort to the well grown birds as I

noticed that at retiring time there was much fussing before all were tucked away, and when one preferred to perch on a nail above the horseshoe, a parent would invariably demand the young one's return to the nest, so I visited my "Wildcatters'" nest, and finding it deserted, took possession, and arranged it on a parallel and about two feet from the other one, thinking my four would divide up and have a bit more room.

I waited with keen anticipation for the evening and return of the family. About sundown they came speeding; mere dots when first I saw them, wheeling, gliding with infinite grace to their last dart beneath the porch and home. And those Swallows went to the new nest, fussed and settled, and thereafter the old nest was discarded.

By this time they were fully grown and their days spent far afield, but night found them at home. From July 16 to 28, out in the morning and back at night.

July 29—There was no homecoming.

"O Spring time sweet!

With silent hope their coming I shall greet."

Oliverea,

Ulster Co., N. Y.