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TWO DAYS WITH A WREN FAMILY

BY MINNA ANTHONY COMMON

The nest was in a coconut shell hung six feet up in a plum tree. I stood facing the entrance at a distance of three feet so that I might see the food as it was brought. The wrens were used to our close approach. With three intermissions, the position was kept up from 5:30 A. M. to 6:17 P. M. on one day. Two days later the same procedure was repeated for three hours, and that was when the young left the home.

JUNE 2: 5:30 A. M.—The female brought a small grasshopper and entered the nest with no hesitancy.

5:34.—The male brought an inch-long tent caterpillar and clung to the outside of the nest; the young put out their bills to receive the food.

5:35.—The female brought a grasshopper (one inch in length) from a southerly direction. I heard a sound in the nest like the waving of wings. The nest rocked all the time from the movement within. I could see four bills at the entrance.

5:35.—The male wren drove away a sparrow that came within twenty feet of the nest.

5:40.—The female wren drove away a Red-eyed Vireo, then brought food. Pleasant chirping issued from the nest.

5:45.—The female brought a grasshopper; removed excrement. She went some distance away. All was quiet in the nest for two minutes, then I heard wing flutterings.

5:49.—The male brought a one-inch grasshopper. A Cowbird was perched in the nest tree, but the wren paid no heed. It glanced at me but fed from outside the entrance hole as usual.

5:50.—The female brought a small miller and removed excrement. The male was hunting through snowberry bushes near by and scolding at a Yellow Warbler.

5:54.—The male brought a small moth and then left for a more distant search.

5:56.—The male returned with a large grasshopper held by one leg. He poked it into the nest door, looked in a second, reached in for the grasshopper—now headless—put it in again, stuck his head inside, looked at me suspiciously and left at 5:59. An instant later he gave me a good scolding—a furious one—from the overhanging maple.

6:00.—The female brought a worm from behind me; the male had flown away in front of me.

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9:17; 9:19; 9:27.—Nestlings fed by the female; much nest noise. A Yellow Warbler came with the wren, watched her go into the nest and seemed to listen.

9:31.—Female brought a green worm.

9:32.—Female brought a miller.

9:33.—The male brought a big miller. He flew twice over my head before entering the nest; he really went inside this time.

9:36; 9:40; 9:42; 9:45; 9:47; 9:50.—The female fed the young all these times. Each time she went directly to the apple tree and brought a small green worm. The last time she went to a rose bush.

9:51.—The male brought a green worm; he put his head in the door to feed the young.

9:53.—The female flew into the hole without pausing on the branch or side.

9:56; 9:58; 10:01.—Young were fed by the female—once a worm; nest quiet.

10:04.—The male brought a miller.

10:06.—The female brought a mosquito.

10:09.—The male brought a large (1½ inch) brown caterpillar.

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12:42 P. M. (temp. 80° F.).—The young were fed by the female. Much chirping in the nest.

12:47.—Young fed. The mother went into the nest and stayed. Quiet reigned.

12:58.—A coaxing noise from the nest which became steadily stronger; no feeding. Finally at 1:05 the noise ceased. It rained lightly. At 1:25 there was again much noise, but sleepy-sounding.

The mother came out of the nest. She stayed in a honeysuckle bush near by, eating.

1:28.—The female brought a 1½-inch hairy caterpillar, limp and dark; it looked like a tent caterpillar. She removed excrement.

1:32.—The female brought a small, smooth, green worm and removed excrement.

1:35.—The female brought a good-sized miller, dead and crumpled. Then she flew away. The young were quiet.

1:38; 1:39.—The female came and entered the nest rapidly. It was still raining lightly. She remained in the nest and all was quiet. At 1:46 there was considerable chirping; the mother was still inside. Quiet at 1:55.

2:02.—The male came with a fat, white grub one inch long and went into the nest; much noise ensued and then it was again quiet. He left in one minute; the female was still inside.

2:05.—Male brought a small moth and fed it from the door. The female flew out. For five minutes there was much noise in the nest; no feeding.

2:12.—Female brought a small insect. At 2:15 three bills showed out of the door.

2:20.—Female brought a miller; removed excrement.

2:21.—Male brought a small white moth.

2:22.—Male brought a small fly. One youngster reached out of the door to seize it. At 2:23 three bills were protruding. At 2:25 three heads were outside, 'yipping.'

2:26.—Female brought a butterfly and fed it by bits from outside to the three young.

2:27.—Female brought a small fly.

2:28.—Female with a green worm. The nest was rocking wildly from the movements inside.

2:29.—Female with an insect.

2:30.—The male brought a horsefly. There was loud chirping and the nest rocked.

2:31.—Female with a large black insect.

2:31.5.—Female with another black insect.

2:32.—Male with a yellow moth. One young had its head out and there was very loud 'yipping.'

2:34.—Female with a very large moth brought from a distant apple tree.

2:38.—Female with a dark moth.

2:39.—Female with a large, furry, yellow fly.

2:40.—Female with a small black beetle.

2:42.—Female with a black moth.

2:43.—Female with a small insect. There was much wing-beating inside the nest.

2:45.—Male brought a caterpillar. There were three open mouths at the door and much noise.

2:46.—Female with a small fly.

2:46.5.—Female with a green caterpillar.

2:47.—Female with a spider. Two heads popped out of the door as the mother left.

2:54.—Male brought a black fly; part was given to two birds from outside.

2:55.—Female with a worm. The wren then flew to a weed patch.

2:57.—Female with a small insect. The wren flew to a snowberry, then to an elm. There was much 'yipping.'

3:02.—Female with a small insect. The wren flew to an apple tree.

3:03; 3:04; 3:05; 3:07; 3:13; 3:14; 3:17.—Female brought flies, moths, and other small insects, alternately.

3:19.—Female with a small insect. Excrement removed; much 'yipping.'

3:20; 3:21; 3:22.—Female with flies and small insects. A great deal of noise was heard in the nest.

3:23.—Male came with nothing in his bill and hopped about the nest tree, and at once the young stopped crying. Then the female brought a worm, fed the babies and chased the male away.

3:25.—The male followed the female which fed a worm, then chased him away.

3:27; 3:29; 3:40.—Same performance repeated. A worm each time.

3:45.—Female with a small insect.

3:46.—Female with a big brown butterfly. She had much difficulty getting it in the door.

3:50.—Female with another butterfly, a monarch.

3:51.—Female with a daddy-long-legs.

3:52.—Female with a green worm.

3:53.—Male brought a large underwing moth.

3:55.—Female with a large, dark moth.

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6:04.—Female with a small insect; excrement removed.

6:17.—Female with a large grasshopper. She went into the nest and did not come out again before dark. All was quiet. The male was nowhere in sight.

Two days later we took our stand in the same place at 7:20 A. M. and had the rare good fortune to witness the young leaving the nest for good.

JUNE 4: 7:20 A. M.—The male brought an insect and scolded.

7:23.—Female brought a small worm, looked me over carefully and scolded.

7:23.5.—Male brought something; I did not see what it was.

7:24.—Female with a small white moth.

7:25.—Female with a small, brown miller.

7:26.—Female with a large, dark brown moth. She went inside and stayed there.

7:27.—The male came and stopped to sing with a small worm dangling from his bill. He fed from outside.

7:31.—The female looked out of the door. The male sang in a neighboring plum tree. Then she carried out excrement and dropped it from the door but stayed inside.

7:34.—Female had her head out. The male sang from a honeysuckle bush. She went back inside.

7:37.—Female put out her head. The male sang from a butternut and a plum. She went back inside.

7:38.—Male chattered and scolded at another wren in the plum. It was one of the babies! Male fed it at 7:40; 7:45; 7:46, singing most of the time.

7:49.—Female finally came out; a young one looked out. A grackle came into the apple tree. All was silent.

7:50–7:56.—Young still looking out of the door. The young in the tree was teasing; male singing near by. Then the young tried to fly but dropped to the ground. Male very distressed; he coaxed it to follow him into the vines on the fence.

8:04.—The young hidden in the low rose bushes was fed by the male.

8:06.—Male fed the young in the bush. Much crying issued from the nest; one head out.

8:10; 8:11; 8:12.—Both adults fed the young in the rose bush. There was not a sound of wrens anywhere.

8:20.—A young rat came sneaking along under the shrubbery and passed the foot of the nest tree. The young looked out at it. Male came and scolded hard.

8:22.—Male was singing in the apple tree. The young in the nest were begging.

8:23.—Female brought an insect and removed excrement, carrying it 12 feet.

8:24.—Female came and looked me over closely. She had no food in her bill. She removed excrement and took it in the opposite direction, 12 feet away.

8:25.—Female fed the young in nest.

- 8:26.—Male fed them a mosquito from the outside.
- 8:28.—The rosebush youngster flew across the garden out of range of vision, but could be heard teasing. All was quiet inside the nest.
- 8:29.—Female fed a good-sized brown miller, then scolded in the butternut tree.
- 8:30.—Male sang on the fence.
- 8:32.—Female brought a large, brown worm and removed excrement.
- 8:39.—The young came flapping back to the rosebushes. The female fed it there at 8:40 and 8:41.
- 8:41.5.—Three young looked out of the nest, crying. The male sang on the fence.
- 8:42.—Another young left the nest and flew into the honeysuckle with much chattering.
- 8:45.—Another baby looked out.
- 8:46.—A third young went into the rosebushes followed by the female. Two young peered out of the nest door. One came outside. There was no noise. An oriole alighted on the fence beside the rosebushes; no sound from the wrens.
- 8:55.—The last young left the nest and flew to the fence (3 feet) and perched on the wire. It lost its balance and turned a complete somersault to its original position.
- 8:59.—The young still sat there, 'yipping.'
- 9:00.—Lost balance again and again; another somersault.
- 9:10.—Young finally fell into the honeysuckle bush, still 'yipping.' There was no answer from the adults.
- After that day the garden was quite deserted by the wrens.

SUMMARY

A wren nest built in a coconut shell which hung five feet from the ground in a plum tree was watched closely for about five hours on June 2 and again for two hours two days later.

During that time the male brought food 38 times and the female 78 times. His contributions were noticeably larger than hers and were fed through the door from the outside. He was seen to enter the nest but twice. The female attended to the nest sanitation. The young left suddenly within a few hours of each other, simply flying out and alighting ten to twenty feet away. They were cared for in the near-by bushes for less than a day and then deserted the neighborhood and were seen no more.

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