

## Boys Build Fine Houses for the Birds

If Our Feathered Friends Don't Flourish in Omaha it Won't Be for Lack of Homes



Here Are a Few Typical Exhibits of the Boys in the Different Public Schools Where the Making of Bird Houses Has Commanded Attention

**T**HE city hall cat will be restrained on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, when an exhibit of bird houses will be held in the city council chamber in the city hall. Some of the avian domiciles will be mounted on trees and the scene will be further embellished by stuffed specimens of birds.

Boys of the manual training departments of thirty-five public schools have been working assiduously for several months on these houses. There will be 360 houses in the exhibit. Miss Helen Thompson, supervisor of manual training in the schools, has charge of the work. She secured sample houses and books on bird house construction. City Commissioner Hummel furnished the lumber and it was Mr. Hummel's suggestion in the first instance that the boys of the schools make these houses for the public parks. Incidental to the making of the houses the children of the schools have been given considerable training in bird life, of the value of the birds and of the practical side of building houses for different kinds of birds.

Parents and children will be invited to the exhibit, which will be free to all. After the exhibit is over, the houses will be turned over to Commissioner Hummel for installation in the parks. The boys have indicated on their houses their preferred parks, so they may observe the occupancy of their handiwork from time to time.

Various materials were used in fashioning these houses. One boy tied himself to a larger boy at Carter lake while he waded out to get reeds of a desired size. A few houses were cut of sections of logs, others made of cans and others of willows. Some are pretentious pieces of work. This bird house feature of the school work has served to stimulate the general interest in birds and has proved beyond expectations of school officials to have been a splendid educational feature. President Ernst of the Board of Education and W. A. Foster, one of the members, are "bird men," and are much interested in the building of bird houses by the boys.

"I do hope the birds will appreciate these houses, for the boys have worked hard," said Superintendent Graff.

tree, which was cut down in a neighboring yard. They cut the tree into blocks and hewed these blocks into bird houses.

The members of the Board of Education have been pleased with this bird house work. They regard it as something more than the mere work of making the houses. They consider it as an ethical matter in connection with the school training. They believe that any activity which inspires boys and girls to get out and take an interest in nature is sure to make for better citizenship, to say nothing of the practical side of caring for the birds.

When Commissioner Hummel shall have placed these houses in the parks it is the intention of many of the teachers to have outings during the spring and early summer for bird study and observation. A group of experienced observers of birds have seen as many as sixty varieties of birds in the local parks in one day. It is known that about 400 kinds of birds of all kinds are seen in Nebraska within a year. Blue birds were seen in Nebraska park last week and other birds are beginning to migrate to this section for their summer visit.

Dr. Solon R. Towne, one of the bird authorities of Nebraska, is interested in the efforts of Omaha school children to provide houses for the feathered residents of the parks. The doctor looks at this subject from the practical as well as the ethical

side. He values the birds as weed destroyers, as well as tree preservers. "The woodpeckers, chickadees, nut hatches and brown creepers work all winter eating caterpillars. The chickadee has been known to have 100 caterpillar eggs in its crop at 6 a. m.," said the doctor.

During a conversation the doctor said: "The downy woodpecker has been referred to by Enos Mills as the tree surgeon, in that it goes all over the bark of a tree after the chrysalis and borers for grubs, particularly into injured bark. Mills has observed one downy woodpecker visit 700 trees in one day. The hairy woodpecker is similar except that it works deeper into the forest. The flicker is fond of ants. It will take several hundred ants from a lawn in short order if given the privilege.

"The chickadee, hairy and downy woodpecker, flicker and red-headed woodpecker all build in hollow trees, but will accept oblong boxes if built similar to the nests they make in their own way.

A prominent German naturalist set out a lot of boxes and found that nine-tenths were occupied. Caterpillars denuded a nearby forest but did not molest his trees because of the extensive bird life he encouraged. The birds that work in our parks during the winter may be favored by preparing proper nests and encouragement by food supply. If such attentions are given, the birds immediately respond by becoming familiar with the neighborhood taking this care. This was brought out by Ernest Harold Bayers of Meriden, N. H., who spoke here a week ago. He showed how his home town has learned to get along without the English sparrow.

"Aside from the winter birds I mentioned there are perhaps twenty-five summer song birds who build their nests here in thickets, and these birds may be helped by promoting growth of shrubbery and bringing the leaves and branches of shrubs together in such a manner that these birds will be attracted. Catbirds and brown

thrashers, for instance, never build nests in trees. "The bird houses should not be painted white or highly colored, because the birds prefer their nests in places which harmonize with the surroundings; in other words, they do not want their nests to be conspicuous. We know that swallows like openings in barns and sheds, and that robins will build in a box if one side is left open."

The bird house campaign created such an interest at Comenius school that 150 boys and girls of the upper grades have formed a branch of the Liberty Bell Bird League, an organization for the study and protection of birds. These members have buttons and they intend to go on field expeditions during the spring and summer. They will make bird houses for their homes and for the friends of the school district. A collection of twenty-five mounted birds is used at the school in connection with the nature study work. Principal Orr is encouraging her children in this activity.