

Enjoying Birds





About siskins, E. R. Davis:

“In a short time the birds [siskins] came to regard me as their friend, and in the days that followed grew to be exceedingly sociable and to lose every vestige of fear. Whenever I would appear at the window, or step outside the door, down they would come and, settling upon my head, shoulders, and arms, would peer anxiously about for the food that they had learned to know I held concealed from them in a box, dish, or other receptacle. The moment I removed the cover or exposed the food, they would make a dash for it and the usual scrapping program would be on. Nor was it at all necessary for me to go outside the door. . . .

“Now and then some members of the flock would elect to spend the night in the warm room, sleeping on the clothes-line, stretched across the room a little below the ceiling.

On such occasions they seemed to be without fear and totally oblivious to people moving about the room, often within a few inches of them, turning on or snapping off electric lights.” (E. R. Davis, *Bird Lore* 1926)

“Since siskins liked to wake him up in the morning, he [Davis] contrived a number of experiments:

‘I placed a small box of seeds on the window-sill near the head of my bed and over it a glass cover. The next morning one of the birds came and looked through the cover at the food, but, of course, was unable to reach it. After hopping around it and trying in vain to get the food, he came to my pillow and pulled my hair to awaken me. Then he flew to the window and tried to get the seeds again. Failing, he returned to me, pulled my hair and pinched my ear, then went again to the glass-covered box. Three times he did the same, and then I ‘awoke’ and reached for the box.

'Immediately he scuttled out on my arm and waited until I removed the cover, when he hopped into the box and enjoyed a well-earned breakfast. And that was no accident, for I had the pleasure of seeing the same performance staged many times afterward.'

'As I said before it was almost impossible for me to enjoy a nap after sunrise. If I just closed my eyes for a moment or two, down would come some member of the flock and pull my hair, pinch my ear, or tweak my nose.'

'Or if that treatment failed to awaken me, he would reach over and gingerly take hold of my eyelid and pull my eye open, for he knew that if I was awakened he would surely get the much desired ration of seeds, and he did. Now and then I would try to fool them. Turning from the window, I made a little tunnel of the bed clothes, some 6–8 inches in length, reaching from my face to the outside so that I could breathe.

'A few minutes later the search was on, and I could hear the birds hopping about the bed clothes. In a little while one of them had discovered the outside opening of the tunnel. Hanging by his claws he bent down and peered into the opening; in the dim light he could see a portion of my face.

'Hopping down he commenced exploring. First he advanced an inch or two, then beat a hasty retreat.

Immediately trying again, he advanced a little farther. About the third or fourth time he succeeded in reaching my face and giving the end of my nose

a good nip. This had the desired effect, for I

immediately threw back the clothes and he

followed my hand to the window where I

uncovered the food and he proceeded to devour it.

After that the jig was up, and soon it seemed that every member of the flock had become expert tunnel explorers.'" (Lawrence Kilham, *On Watching*

Birds, pp. 54, 55, quoting E. R. Davis)

Len Howard



““I was busy within, near an open door, when a Blue Tit came fluttering up with cries of distress. She hovered agitatedly close in front of me, her eyes fixed on mine, crying as I had never heard a Blue Tit cry before; it was at once obvious something was wrong and she was asking for my help.

'Her mate was with her but perched just outside, watching me intently. Directly I went out she stopped crying and they led me to their nesting-box. . . . The whole of her nest had been pulled into fragments . . . and her twelve eggs lay scattered over the hard wooden floor. . . .

'The lid was shut so it appeared a cat had clawed out the nest in pieces through the entrance hole.

'Both tits waited close by, silently watching while I quickly gathered the fragments of the nest from the ground, removed the eggs and reformed the nest in the box as well as I could, then replaced the eggs on the right side of the box, thinking she would like it as near as possible the same as before.

'Directly I had finished the mother bird flew in, and after removing her eggs to the other side of the rather large box, brooded her clutch again. Ten days later the eggs hatched, and she brought off her brood in spite of the calamity because she sensibly thought of appealing to me for help. What else except thought could have made her act thus?

'It is not a bird's instinct to seek man but avoid him over anything in connection with nesting affairs. I had not been long in my cottage and no other bird had been helped over nesting difficulties or anything else. I had merely fed the birds and watched unseen while they built their nests. But many birds had grown tame and they trusted me.'" (Lawrence Kilham, *On Watching Birds*, pp. 56, 57, quoting Len Howard from his *Birds as Individuals*)