

The Importance of People

Column Editor: Harold Benjamin
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The editor sometimes wonders why a column professedly devoted to the importance of people should feature so many non-human creatures. Within the last twelve months Tovatt's chamelons, Keene's prairie dogs and Crabb's parsnips and eggplants have appeared here. Some incautious readers have indeed been led so far astray by these fables as to search for pedagogical morals in them.

Now comes Story's nature-loving birds, concerning which the editor feels impelled to offer a note of modest warning. These birds mean to say nothing other than what they do say. They represent no one but themselves. There they are, just as they are, no more and no less. Let them stand on their own feet and fly on their own wings. They desire to watch men? That is merely pure science or at least recreation.

Harold Benjamin

A Bird's Guide to People-Watching

THE rewarding hobby of people-watching is becoming increasingly popular. New converts to this fascinating pursuit are being won every day. Formerly the casual pastime of a few sky-weary idlers, it has rapidly assumed the status of a real avocation, pursued by many serious devotees. In the hope that novices will welcome a few hints about getting started in this leisure-time activity, the following technical suggestions are offered to beginners.

Taking a brief man's-eye view, it is obvious that the first requisite skill for this new sport is rudimentary *window-perching*. How can it be exercised most fruitfully?

Hints on Young-People Watching

Many of our foremost people-watchers agree that the most highly rewarding experience for the beginner may be had in watching the young of this species in the curious institutions called *schools*. It is rather easy to perch outside a convenient schoolroom window, or even inside the room as some of the more daring watchers do. A better understanding of people can thus be built by closely observing the curious

and complex set of habits which this species transmits so carefully to its young.

What should one look for? What can we expect to observe in these big humming gatherings in which this curious breed chooses to school its younger members?

The watcher must first steel himself to the startling fact that these creatures actually seem not to know what they are doing in their young-training roosts. It took pioneer people-watchers a long time, and then only by happy accident, to discover this amazing circumstance. The earlier observations have been repeatedly and critically verified. It is now fully demonstrated that *there is actual disagreement among the human species as to how their fledglings should be brought up.*

Once a bird has accustomed himself to this strange fact and to an acceptance of the curious evolutionary mutation which must have brought it about, he begins to see better the interesting potentialities of people-watching. It becomes an exciting contest of reporting ever newer and more incredible instances of unusual customs and hap-

penings. In a paper read recently before a large gathering of the Sparrows International People-Watchers' Society, in what is perhaps the largest belfry in New York City, a visiting woodpecker developed the subject, "Startling Divergences from Nature among Humans as Evidenced by Objectively Observed Practices in One Hundred Selected School Systems in America." It was his interesting thesis that every single instance observed seemed to be carefully designed to be as far removed from the nature of the human child as possible.

Dangers in People-Watching

It should be stated that since the publication of this study some slight controversy has arisen. Isolated instances have been described which would tend to refute some of its particulars, but these are perhaps too few, as yet, to challenge the overwhelming evidence of this exemplary research project.

Few of us, of course, have the specialized interest of the academic researcher, but such findings hint at the richness of the field and especially at the challenge of its ever-rewarding surprises and inconsistencies. There are always interesting new discoveries to be found in the next classroom.

One note of warning should be sounded to those who might be foolishly tempted to emulate any of the odd customs of child-rearing to which the strange human species is addicted. There was the near-tragic case of the family of starlings who retarded the flying of one of its young for more than a month by giving it too much of the human-type advice and supervision. For a time, in fact, there was grave doubt that the youngster would ever fly at all. In another mis-application of people-watching zeal, a group of

crows in Nebraska attempted recently to develop a corn-digging curriculum for their young. To their astonishment they found that a dangerous rigidity of behavior in this activity was the immediate result of the systematic instruction. Since they discovered the difficulty in time and promptly discontinued the class, no permanent injury was suffered by the subjects of the experiment.

Lessons To Be Learned from People-Watching

These distressing results of trying to test patterns of human behavior in bird situations have led some people-watchers to drop the hobby. It must be emphasized that the observation of human beings in their schools or elsewhere is not at fault; that it is rather the attempted transfer to bird life of certain observed practices which carries evil consequences.

This is not to say that birds cannot profit from people-watching. Important principles of behavior-changing in birds can be and have been derived from study of human aberrations in the practice of education.

If people wanted to teach their young to balance on a telephone wire, for instance, they would first break the process down into units of study: the approach up-wind or down-wind, the grasp of the wire, the use of the head and wings in attaining equilibrium, and the technique of the take-off. It is apparent to any bird that such a fragmentation of the process would get a fledgling hopelessly and perhaps permanently entangled in a mess of what to do now and what to do next. To the human being, however, this fatal deterioration of learning seems almost inevitable. That is probably why one never sees a man lighting on a wire.

Human beings have a language, of

course, like all other creatures. Any experienced people-watcher can testify that they use the language not merely for communication in the normal manner but also to frustrate and confuse their young and themselves. It has even been suggested by some observers that men pick their language to pieces in their schools and then make their young put it together again. This hypothesis is too wild for ready credence. Most authorities refuse to believe that people are that stupid.

People-watchers must always remember that the "early bird gets his man" and that the man's activities, particularly in his behavior-changing, are often rewarding to observe. One must work at the job. One must be alert, careful and quick to seize the current moment's lesson. One must remember, though only for figurative application of course, the old eagle adage that "a child in the claws is worth two in the nursery."—*M. L. Story*, Winthrop College, Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Curriculum Bulletins

Column Editor: Eleanor Merritt

School and Community Work Together

SCHOOLS and communities are active partners in today's educational process. Evidence that this relationship has developed beyond the discussion stage is the production of many bulletins which describe programs in action. The publications listed below suggest specific projects and practices which have actually been carried on to improve school-community relations.

► Board of Education of the City of New York. *Bridges Between the School and the Community in Junior High Schools and Grades Seven and Eight of Elementary Schools*. New York City, New York, 1949, 79p. 25c.

This bulletin reviews accepted and approved practices in school-community relations. It shows how theories, principles and philosophies concerning school-community relations are being implemented in the New York City Junior High Schools and in the seventh and eighth years of the Elementary Schools by relating anecdotal accounts

of projects now in operation. This three-part source book contains illustrative practices concerning: School People Reach the Community; The Community Returns to School; and Expanding Horizons.

► Alabama Department of Education. *Using Resources of the Community to Build a School Program*. Bulletin 1950—No. 12. Montgomery, Alabama, 1950, 118p.

A study in the field of conservation and intelligent use of resources by a member of the Alabama Department of Education has resulted in the preparation of this publication. It describes the way seven schools improved the quality of living in their respective communities through resource-use education. A chapter devoted to practical suggestions concerning ways a resource-use program may be put into action is an important inclusion.

► Seattle Public Schools. *How We Teach . . .* Series. Seattle 9, Washing-

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