

con's handsome eggs, however, have made her famous. Yet, if this species laid unmarked eggs in stick nests built in the willow thickets out in the valley, it would attract no more attention than the humble Cooper Hawk. What is there about a visit to the haunts of the Prairie Falcon that is so alluring? What is it that impels a bird-lover to return year after year to the same dry washes and the same rough, treeless ridges? These questions are best answered in the language of my companion on one of my trips. It was a warm afternoon and we had been tramping steadily from a far-flung spur of a certain range of hills. As we neared the crest of a high ridge we paused to gaze silently out into the great sun-swept valley where a distant town shimmered faintly in the afternoon sunlight. Picking up his coil of rope preparatory to resuming the climb, my companion turned to me and said, "Attaboy, Tyler; this is the life."

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### THE BOY WHO HUNTS\*

By ROLAND C. ROSS

Asst. Supervisor, Nature-study Department, Los Angeles City Schools

**T**ODAY the modern boy cannot go gunning as did his father. Sentiment is against it, game is scarce, and laws prevent him. Yet boys will be boys, and hunt they must. Our problem is to divert this inbred love of the chase along constructive lines and not to destroy his heritage.

Frowning upon bird-killing or forbidding sling-shots will not change the desire. If you take anything at all from the boy you must give him something better in its place, else it is not a fair trade and he will long for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Sentiment loses its charm when the hunt begins. Aesthetic training suffices very well with small children, but the boys soon outgrow it. The boy is a hunter and we may as well accept the fact.

This instinct to hunt the living thing I have learned to utilize in teaching nature to children. It is only recently that I have become aware that parents, teachers, and bird-lovers are still trying to deter young hunters by negations

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or entreaties. Because of this I venture to relate my experiences in dealing with the problem, and the method which I follow. My work has been in direct contact with children for a number of years. My records show 1958 children on field trips three years ago; the other years average about the same.

As a boy I walked the woods alone. Companions were too often noisy and uninterested in the ways of nature, and so I soon learned the value of quietness if I expected to 'sit in' on the family affairs of wild folk. Later I learned that motion was even more of a 'give-away' than sound. Then one day I found myself close to a woodchuck and, being unseen, I 'froze.' The thought came to try an approach as I was already so dangerously near that I must soon be discovered. Bolt upright, inch by inch, I stepped nearer, until, when the 'chuck' did vanish, I was so close that I had the thrill of a lifetime. His attitude, as he alternately eyed my approach and nibbled the young wheat, is still a vivid picture.

From this time on I stalked everything that was stalkable, bird, beast, and insect, and found my joy in outwitting wild life at its own game. The pride that comes from the victory of wit and keen sense beclouds the paltry trophy of lifeless flesh that is brought down by the gun. The man who, all unsensed, works his way past the keen guards of wild animals, and uncovers the secrets of these secret folk, is ten times a hunter, for he has the game in his power; their secrets are his.

Briefly then the method is this: The group of pupils and I meet and after some talk they express an interest in stalking birds or animals. Before we start it is understood that absolute quiet must obtain when called for, that movements are to be made *en masse* and *with* the leader. Near at hand we find our gopher, squirrel, or bird, and plan our course of action. Taking note of wind, sun, and contour of the land, our path is laid out, always in a line straight to the creature. With the sun at our backs we have the advantage of the light.

When the approach is begun every eye is upon the prey and from start to finish glances to either side are absolutely taboo. Moreover, no scarfs or coat-tails are left free to fly in the wind, and all hands are kept quiet in pockets or behind the back. During the approach warnings are given against any lateral motion or sidestepping, and all are urged to move *at* the object of the hunt. As we near the bird our steps are shortened until we barely advance two inches a step, and if we have success and come exceedingly close our movements are so slight as to become a burden. If the bird goes up and away, we try again, and very seldom do we fail of an approach so close that the children are fascinated.

If there is time, the leader stalks a bird, and then each child is given a chance to stalk his own. The group works at a great disadvantage, but the rules are the same for all, whether one or a dozen. Motion toward the object; steady motion without jerks; slow motion; plenty of pauses at times when the creature becomes too attentive; and last and foremost, PATIENCE.

What are the results? Generally, a worried, pestered time for all wild creatures in the locality. Later, if the effort is not followed up, the experience becomes but a pleasant memory in the minds of most of the children. A few adopt the idea and it shapes their attitude toward game and living things, so that years after we find them making daily observations of natural things

and entering the secret places for themselves. If the work is followed up with other trips and with pictures, books, and talks, most of them soon have their own tales to tell of vital experiences gained by stalking.

One group of 'bad' boys had little interest in my proposed kind of hunting, but after seeing the successful stalking of a gopher they needed holding in. When the thirty minute period was over, every boy had had his chance to worm over the ground and approach a wary gopher as he gathered his clover. There were several gophers harvesting or throwing up dirt in the vacant lot we visited, and most of the boys were able to get within arm's length of a feeding, busy animal. I find that directions may be given in a low voice with safety and find, too, that they are needful when a boy reaches the critical place, close to the creature.

Occasionally we pick up an animal or bird by a sudden grab. The children always are willing to free it in a moment. One girl, after many stalks, came up behind a billy owl and caught it, but his claws tore her hands rather severely and she lost her bird.

Stalking does not encourage 'killers.' A stone or a gun is much easier. The boys realize that the stalk gives the animal every advantage, and yet they can beat him, outwit him, at his own game. It takes more nerve and skill than mere gunning. As we talk it over they begin to see that it was the possession of this skill, and not their weapon, that makes the hunters of old, their heroes. For, after all, it is the game we play, the hunt, the chase, that brings the thrill. A carcass *ends* the sport.

For the growing, developing boy, I like this game. Once well started the 'hunt in him' carries it on. No preaching is necessary; he likes living things as well as you. And, lastly, it is but the beginning of good things, and leads him on to the next lesson of '*waiting* in the wilderness.'

*Los Angeles, California, February 13, 1923.*