

Already there is a real and appealing need for extensive study in methods of preventing or reducing bird damage through means less drastic than wholesale destruction. There is missionary and experimental work to be done, largely of the farm demonstration type, to meet certain situations in which the most practical and economical solution seems to be, not in attempts at bird control, but in the avoidance of damage by a well planned change in the crops being raised. It will take time and patience and a sympathetic understanding of the viewpoint of those affected to reach a satisfactory solution in matters such as these. To deny a fair hearing or to minimize a just complaint may cause irreparable harm to the very cause we hold most sacred. An open-mindedness, and a willingness to study and decide each problem on its merits should characterize every attempt at appraisal or adjustment. Much of this can be done only in the field, and it is there, as I see it, whence our most important missions in economic ornithology now beckon.

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NINETY MINUTES WITH ROBERT RIDGWAY

BY DAYTON STONER

Contacts with the masters lend inspiration and enthusiasm to the efforts of those who would learn. Such a contact serves as the basis for the present brief narrative.

In the course of an automobile trip from Denver, Colorado, to Gainesville, Florida, taken in October, 1927, by Mrs. Stoner and the writer, we recalled, as we neared Olney, Illinois, that this was the home town of Robert Ridgway, who, at the time of his death in 1929, without doubt was entitled to the distinction of being the Dean of living American ornithologists. Accordingly, it was decided to halt at this shrine for a passing visit.

Upon inquiry in the town we learned that the home of Mr. Ridgway was about a half mile from the business district and easily accessible. Driving south over the railroad tracks the visitors approached on their left a slight elevation, "Larchmound". This tract was well fenced in and presented a trimly cut lawn whereon the great profusion and variety of trees and shrubbery at once attracted attention. And, well back from the highway, beneath two tall and symmetrical larch trees nestling among this dense growth and more or less hidden by vines and shrubs, reposed an old and unpretentious, though well pre-

served, brick structure, the commodious and comfortable home of the great ornithologist.

A winding brick walk invited one toward the house and the visitor was prone to stop frequently to examine a plant or to catch a more intimate glimpse of a flitting bird. But his enthusiasm received somewhat of a jolt when upon reaching the door he beheld a neatly written notice posted thereon and stating that "Mr. Ridgway is not available to visitors between 9:00 A. M. and 5:00 P. M., except by appointment."

I had never met Mr. Ridgway and having no "appointment" I was about to retreat in good order when it occurred to me that even if I did attempt to intrude upon his presence I would receive only a verbal denial or at most be accused of inability to read. Thus mustering up my courage, I pushed the bell. After a short wait there appeared in the doorway a rather slightly built and somewhat stooped elderly gentleman who upon inquiry admitted that he was Robert Ridgway. The seeming affability of the man gave me confidence and I explained that I had been a student of a well known professor of Zoology with whom Mr. Ridgway formerly had been associated in field work, and that, being interested in birds myself, I had taken the liberty of dropping in on him for an impromptu visit. "Just walk about in the yard for a bit; I shall be right out", he said. And in a short while, having donned coat and hat, Mr. Ridgway presented himself to us on the spacious lawn.

Then followed an hour of inspection of his horticultural endeavors which had occupied much of his time during recent years. Failing eyesight, Mr. Ridgway stated, had compelled him to forego in some measure research in ornithology and in order to satisfy his naturalist's proclivities he had taken up botanical pursuits.

A great profusion of native and exotic plants from many places had been accumulated at Larchmound by Mr. Ridgway. India, China, the South Sea Islands, the West Indies, and South America were among the distant regions represented in this vegetational display. It was a pleasure to note the great joy that the owner experienced in explaining this or that plant; occasionally he varied the procedure by quickly breaking off a twig or a bit of fruit from one, to present as a gift. The matter of fact way in which he employed botanical phraseology was something to admire and indicated an unusual degree of familiarity with the plant kingdom.

Now and again a bird bath or half-concealed feeding place for birds was disclosed during our ramble which included an inspection of the large open area between the house and barn. Cardinals, Blue

Jays, Robins, and other birds were observed as they accepted the advantages of this proffered hospitality.

Being reminded that volume nine of his latest masterpiece "The Birds of North and Middle America" was yet to be completed, the author quietly, indifferently, admitted the allegation and continued his discussion of some interesting native or exotic plant.

The honors having been done for the outdoor attractions, an invitation was extended to enter the house. We stood not on formality and were ushered into a comfortable sitting room by the back way. Immediately following introduction to his sister, Mrs. Lida Palmatier, who had lived with him since the passing of Mrs. Ridgway, Mr. Ridgway brought forth a box of Perfectos, offered a cigar and chose one for himself.

Then resting comfortably in his chair and serenely blowing faint rings of blue smoke, the noted ornithologist recalled for us some of the changes that had taken place in the local native bird and plant life of the territory about Olney since he had known it. This reminiscent mood was full of action, life, and an occasional bit of humor; and no small amount of interest was furnished the occasion by Mrs. Palmatier's quite supplementary observations.

To an ornithologist, perhaps the item of greatest interest outside the host and his sister was the bird feeding station which extended the full width of the ledge of a large east window. This permitted a flood of autumn sunlight to enter the room and at the same time a view of the flights and foibles of the feathered tribe that found here an abundant daily repast. While we looked and talked, Blue Jays, Robins, a White-breasted Nuthatch, a Cardinal, Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees, and a Mockingbird graced the board with their presence.

Too soon the cigars had burned; time had flown. Conversation had not lagged but the journey must be resumed.

This brief and informal yet pleasant and intimate contact with a leader in his chosen profession has left its ineffaceable imprint on the recipient of the benefaction, who, previous to this meeting, was quite unknown to the benefactor except through the medium of a few publications. The personal charm of Robert Ridgway will ever be recognized as one of his finest attributes. It is an attribute that we all can afford to cultivate.

NEW YORK STATE MUSEUM,
ALBANY, N. Y.