

CHAPTER IV

SHADE SWAMP SANCTUARY

"Wherever I go I tread in the tracks of
the Indian." Thoreau

In the center of Connecticut, in the charming colonial town of Farmington, there is a small woods-surrounded open plateau of land, over-looking the Farmington River valley where Indians lived for centuries. It is a miniature scene, compared to western outlook scenes, but here, not so very long ago, the indigenous residents pitched their tepees. They hallooted to one another from the river to the top of this terrace, they kept life-protecting lookouts on duty, they packed down the nearby paths with their moccasined feet. Below the plateau on the opposite side, there was a swamp, around which their padded paths could still be discerned in the 1930's, when I was there.

On this high terrace I raised my new umbrella tent at the shady northern end. No one in all of America could have been as delighted as I with their summer job, for I was appointed State Nature Guide, the first in the country, in this bit of wild Connecticut, a spot known in this Indianless century as Shade Swamp Sanctuary.

This was in the day of the CCC, a day of courageous imagination

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which met a crisis between wars, when both nation and states dared spend money on its desperate youth and on the kind of constructive work projects which a nation needs done all ^{of} the time but on which it seldom spends the funds. The worst depression was at its peak. Many Connecticut leaders, inspired by the needs of the times, sought and found fascinating methods of presenting nature to youth who needed the outdoors as a balance wheel against the desperation of the cities, while at the same time improving the conditions of some of the state's natural resources.

Some of the CCC young men cleared out an overgrown old wagon trail at Shade Swamp Sanctuary, and cut out brush over the Indian trails around the swamp. Near the entrance to the Sanctuary, they built animal shelters, and added heavy wire fence around that area to form a primitive-type zoo. It was to serve as a rescue home for wild animals, which then, now and everywhere meet with misfortune when too close to civilization. All of the summer I was there the shelters and cages were kept pretty much occupied by deer caught in barbed wire or chased by dogs, by animals caught in traps which shouldn't have been, and some animals found in various stages of starvation for one reason or another. Some of them were rescued by game wardens, or by the Humane Society, or turned in by concerned citizens. The big enclosure where they were housed, with large, ^{fenced-in} open yards, backed up against woods so that the animals could have some sense of being in a familiar habitat.

Special large cages had been built by the CCC boys nearby, where owls that had been caught in traps, or skunks removed from under houses, or grouse or ducks too wounded to fly, could stay and

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and be fed regularly until strong enough to be returned to the woods to take their chances once more in the dwindling wild habitats behind the cities.

Down the wild wagon road through the woods, about a quarter of a mile from ~~entrance~~, but out of sight of the entrance, was a natural open water area on the edge of the swamp. The State Fish and Game Department, using CCC help, had enclosed a long area there with chicken wire, and had built open-fronted shelters on stilts over the water, with crossbars for perches inside them. The whole thing resembled a row of chicken houses built over water, with "front yards" in shallow water. Several pens were partitioned off with wire so that different species could have their own pens. Nature maintained the water level, and presumably kept the water more or less changed. At least it was never stagnant when I was there.

Various ducks and water birds were kept in these pens, most of them brought to the Sanctuary by game wardens for one reason or another. Among these birds, which were to become my companions for the summer, were blue-winged teal, pintails, wood ducks, mallards, two Canada geese, a great blue heron, a black-crowned night heron, and a bittern.

The path which came in from the Sanctuary entrance widened out in front of the pens, allowing ample space for visitors and groups like Scouts, for viewing the water birds. At one corner of this observation area, near the entrance path, the CCC had built a small roofed exhibit stand, where posters and information notices

could be posted. There was also small shel-like counter on which could be exhibited such forest items as cones and seeds with labels, and insects in Riker mounts.

Along the south side of the duck pens, and around the west side of the swamp, on ground raised just above the wet, was an old Indian trail, single-file width. The CC boys had cleared out the fallen branches and the briars so that visitors could walk in the old trail. Soil which is packed by human feet for centuries doesn't return to soft, airy-enough consistency to permit small-root growth for a very long time. Sometimes it seems to take earthworms and other soil-working organisms a couple of centuries or more to invade packed soil, so that fine root hairs of plants can push in and also have enough air. The speed of this process depends upon circumstances, such as wetness of the soil, its acidity and rocky or non-rocky nature. Close to this ^aswamp the water table was maintained so high that few organisms could survive long without drowning. Large tree roots could push their way through, but small root hairs cannot invade it. Thus it was easy to discern this particular Indian-packed path, even though it was under heavy leafy canopy overhead.

The trained, seeing eye, picks out such a straight trail, as it is contrary to the normal broken patch-work of accessory forest vegetation. Abandoned deer trails sometimes give the effect of an unnatural line through bushy woods, but they seldom form a straight line and they always peter out and branch into several directions. Indian trails take much more purposeful directions.

No doubt there were still more Indian-trodden paths still to be found through the New England woods, though they were fast losing their identify. Many such trails, because they were the best

routes worked out by the Indians, have since become roads, even super-highways, as the Indians didn't need instruments to determine the most direct routes and the best contours. Indian trails were often continuous for miles. One of their Connecticut trails extended from the shore in the vicinity of New Haven, northward through central Connecticut. then eastward to the shore in the Boston area, a distance of well over a hundred miles; another trail followed the southern Connecticut shore up around through what is now Rhode Island to the same destination. There ~~was~~^{are} many Indian trails throughout New England which are now well marked in state forests or through town parks, of which some have had their histories worked out.

The Shade Swamp Sanctuary trails were much more local in character. In addition to the one along the edge of the swamp there was a trail, from each end of the duck pens, which led up to an overlooking terrace above, though you couldn't look down on the duckpens because of the dense shrubbery along the slope. The trail followed the western edge of the terrace. The eastern edge of the plateau looked down and out over the Farmington River valley where the vegetation was not too dense. You couldn't see the river though it wasn't far away; it is known to have been a major highway for the Indians of this area. The plateau had been a natural campground site for them, where they could keep a lookout and send signals back and forth. No doubt the Indians kept that foreground cut or burned down, to give them their needed view.

There was a limited opening in the treetops down that east as if a tree or two had fallen, through which you could see the spires of Hartford, especially Travelers Tower. But I

end

was much too contented to be out of sight of Hartford to be tempted very often to go peek through that opening. But the path which came up from the duck pens, and along the upper edge of that slope, made it easy for me and any visitors to get up there. Only a few visitors were interested enough but some did want a longer walk.

The southern two thirds of the flat terrace had been planted by the CCC to wildlife food shrubs and vines, as an experiment to learn which species would attract and hold wildlife on the Sanctuary. It was quite an extensive planted area; the soil was typical sandy as found on river terraces, yet most of the plants seemed to do well there that year. I had reason later in the summer to wish that some of them produced the kind of food I could eat.

The back, or northern, third of that terrace was not quite so open; there were a few young trees, and several shrubs. A path which led down from it went directly into woods, so it was the most closed-in path of those I have mentioned. It was at this end that I set up my umbrella tent. Nearby was a one-room tar paper ~~shack~~ whose only inside furnishing was an old wood-burning kitchen range which proved a godsend the few damp days I was there. This building became my office and storage space, by virtue of my having procured a few wooden boxes from the Sanctuary caretaker. I had brought two wooden orange crates with me, one of which I stood on end in the tent as a night table, which held toothbrush, hair brush, flash light, and towels and wash cloths. The other I stood on end in the shack and ~~stacked~~ ^{stacked} canned goods, cereals, and various food items in it.

I had two cots in the tent, anticipating a visitor now and then, though I knew I could never inveigle my sister into staying out there overnight. Though the shack had a door which I could lock,

I much preferred to be out where only a cloth wall separated me from crickets and sleepy bird cheeps in the middle of the night. This was the answer to the dream of long childhood and teen years.

The day we had arrived, in my sister's car, the gamekeeper and his wife were in the deer yard at the entrance, putting out fresh hay and other fodder. They were an older couple, on the shady side of middle age, which seemed ancient to me. The man was quite shy and very courteous, but his wife, whose face I could scarcely see under a great, broad-brimmed hat, was an enigma from the start. My superiors, from the State Fish and Game Department, had introduced me to them when they took me out there a few days before, and even at that time the woman had seemed unapproachable, but I had attributed her behavior to shyness in the presence of educated government big wheels. For my part, I was glad to see that they lived at the Sanctuary entrance. I assumed that not only were they guardians of the place but it would be pleasant to visit with them on an occasional summer evening.

The day that we arrived with my possessions, when I led my sister over to meet them I was a little disappointed to see the woman turn her back on us and walk to the far side of the deeryard. Unbeknownst to innocent me at the time, the behavior of this older woman was prophetic of a form of human thinking which was to confront me until I was gray-haired myself. I entered Shady Swamp Sanctuary walking through a dreamy rainbow. By summer's end I had learned that not all people looked at the world as I did.

The plateau where I made my home for the summer was a Nature hideaway for such a wildling as myself. I was so contented there, at last living in a wild corner of nature that I didn't care if I

never again saw another edifice of civilization. This was a cosmic point in time which belonged to me. Unhandseled, as Thoreau would say, by mankind.

I was ashamed of my tent's newness at summer's start. It had a soft, ultra-neat, city-slicker look to it. I gloated every time it rained and the wind slapped at it, for they gradually beat it into a more seemly aspect for its habitat. At first it stood out, too easy to see in its stiffness despite its khaki color. Soon the sun helped bleach some of the too-rich khaki color out of it; as the summer wore on it blended more into its tree-edge background. Some people who came up to walk along the terrace edge never saw it. But then, most such visitors do not have a seeing eye, which is why deer and other wild animals escape unseen.

One of my duties as nature guide was to answer ^{the} questions of visitors at the animal cages, and in the duck ares. Much of my time was spent walking back and forth between the cages and the duck pens, either with the visitors, or checking to see if anyone had come in at the entrance. The broad-brimmed hat owner had made it obvious I was not welcome hanging around the cages waiting for people to appear, so I wasted much time walking back and forth to check. But folks came in crowds on weekends, and during the holidays, as the Fish and Game Department ran stories in the newspapers about the Sanctuary, with pictures of the animals and the ducks. There were times when I wished they would stop such publicity for some visitors acted as if their major goal was to get a piece of me or my clothing for a souvenir. That summer I learned the lesson that altogether too many people only want to be entertained, they don't want to be educated. And souvenir collecting is a form of entertainment.

During the week scheduled groups were more apt to come, such

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as scouts, 4-H groups and church groups. As feeding hours for the animals were posted at the entrance ~~was posted~~, most groups came at those times, which made it a little easier for me to watch for them, though the hands under the big hat did much of the feeding. Sometimes when I was stuck out there alone with only the **Big Hat** around I would stare wistfully at the animals, hoping they got my friendly message, hoping they recognized a kindred spirit, for I knew if I tried talking to them I would be chased away.

There was a fish hatchery over beyond the zoo cages. It was just far enough of a walk so that few people felt tempted to walk over there although it was open to visitors. Even back then, too many people had developed car legs; they wanted to drive right up to an attraction. I walked over every now and then, as such masses of fish in so big a pool was utterly fascinating, but I never dared be gone too long from the trails when I was supposed to be on duty.

It was while nature guiding at Shade Swamp that I became aware of a few things about my culture. Most women, but also some men, will not walk one more step than they have to while outdoors, and if a sidewalk is in sight, they ^{prefer} to walk on it to being on a dirt trail. An earthen trail has to be short, with a specific goal at the end. I'm speaking of adults, who seem to have lost all desire for exploration and for conquering the elements. The children still skipped and hopped and ran along ahead. This has been true generation after generation. I have never learned where the dividing line is, - when the veneers of civilization take over.

Associated with the behavior is the fear most women and some men have of snakes, almost all of it imaginary. I learned that summer to remove all sticks lying in paths. Sticks have an amazing way of

transforming themselves into snakes. No amount of explaining, or trying to reason helps. It's easier to move the sticks. What was true then, in the 1930's, is still true today, in the 1980's, despite all the TV programs, classroom education, park ranger talks, and museum exhibits which have taken place in between. Some people seem to resent learning the truth. They WANT to be frightened, and there is no easier way of attaining a self-scare than turning a stick into a snake. No matter what is said, of course, about snakes being more afraid of people than people of snakes.

As I became adjusted to my schedule I knew when I had free moments to myself. I found the Sanctuary a quiet, delightful place to sit at the edge of a path, or on a log, or in front of the duck pens, and imbibe by osmosis the effervescent ions in my environment. I could relax and be a Neanderthal or Cro-Magnon Miss, in peace.

The ducks and swamp birds became so accustomed to my presence they talked and cavorted as if I weren't there. When visitors were present their behavior was immediately different; they acted like another set of birds. Up to this point in my life I'd not yet had the benefit of formal studies in bird behavior; in fact, the subject was still mostly a closed book in the science world. But I was constantly aware of their communication with one another in both voice and body language. I felt at the time that if I could stay with them long enough, I, too, could communicate with them, and of course this has now happened in recent animal behavior studies.

I had no way of knowing then, nor had the scientists yet come upon the concept, that the behavior of birds holds an important key

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to unlocking ~~the~~ mysteries of human behavior for the birds are still reacting according to instinct while human instinct is in place but smothered under layers of cultural demands. Some of our inherent reactions are almost identical to those of birds.

The great Blue Heron had quite an ~~un~~impersonable way about him when he was busy with his little affairs of the day. As soon as people ~~appeared~~ ^{appeared} he was most dull-ly unoccupied. I had to restrain visitors from throwing sticks and stones at him over the wire mesh in their desire to make him do something. This slate-blue bird is the largest wading bird in New England, second in size among herons to the great white heron which is found in our south. The great blue stands three and a half feet tall in its bare feet. It is a typical heron, strictly a water-habitat bird; it lives on fishes and frogs along streams and lakes or in swamps. The great blue nests as a lone pair or in colonies. Often one pair will command a whole ^{small} lake as its feeding territory, not permitting another of its kind to share the lake. The one at Shade Swamp looked lonely, standing up there so often like a motionless stick, but it was possible he felt like king of the swamp since no other great blue was in sight.

The black-crowned night heron in the pen was a new bird to me when I was at Shade Swap. It's a sleek, neat bird, looking as if it just stepped out of a bandbox. In anthropomorphic terms, it is conservatively ^{ly} and tastefully dressed in its black ~~back~~, black crown with white curving plumes descending over neat silver gray wings and white shirt front. But to me it always seemed to have a cross look on its face though I never saw it act surly toward the other birds. No doubt it was the close-set red eyes which gave that appearance in addition to a white line like a furrow just above the large, heavy, straight beak. It all added up to a scowl.

Stewart

When I first arrived this black crowned night heron always looked hunched over, with its head scrootched down into its neck feathers. But as it gradually recognized me as a non-dangerous local inhabitant, it kept its head up much of the time and was often busy at preening, or scratching, or just looking around. Now and then it jumped down closer to the water, obviously hunting for a small fish or a frog. In time it was one of those which added its voice to the cacophony of the others when they were all in a talking mood.

One of the most ludicrous expressions any bird can get on its face is attained by the bittern, for it sticks its head straight up into the sky, and runs its eyes almost together in front, at the base of its bill so it can watch what is going on while pretending to be a cattail blade. Early on, when my presence there intimidated all of the water birds in the pens, the bittern would hold its pose stiffly for as long as I stood there. I have since known bitterns to stand in such a stance for hours. You can almost brush against a posing bittern in a swamp without seeing it. It is mostly the color of dead grass and animals with such protective coloration usually permit close approach; they won't move until almost stepped on. Instinct tells them if they are going to look like a plant they had better act like one; no plant gets up and walks away.

If you think a loon has a fantastic wild voice, the bittern makes the loon sound like music. The first time I heard the Sanctuary bittern I was writing up in the shack with the door wide open as it was a warm summer day. The sound which suddenly rolled up from the duck pen suggested some poor creature was being thumped to death. I rushed down there by the nearer north path, loose gravel rolling and rattling after me. All was quiet by the time I reached the pens.

I *Shenwood* stood motionless, looking over the whole place. All the ducks, herons and other birds were dozing or lazily nibbling on something, as if nothing had happened. There was no sign at all of recent mayhem. I felt like a grammar school teacher who had just hurried into the classroom after hearing a great commotion from down the corridor, only to find absolute quiet and every child busy with some legitimate activity.

Then one bird moved. It was the bittern. He stretched his long skinny neck up full length, crossed his eyes, and his throat began to vibrate, with a action I had never seen before. Suddenly he gurgled, and pumped his whole being, emitting the most unattractive noise. He sounded as if about to regurgitate^t some horrible nightmare of indigestion and acted as if all of his insides were about to come up and be ejected. The other birds remained poised and quiet, the sleepy ones barely responding to the commotion. I was staring right at the bittern, yet the moment he stopped, which was most abruptly, I could scarcely believe it was he who had made that harsh, vulgar, most uneuphonious sound. As astounded as I was, I was even more impressed with the total nonchalance, and acceptance of his voice, exhibited by all the other birds. Not one had reacted with alarm. Right then and there was created in me a desire to study wild things as they react to one another in the wild. But the world was not ready for such as me or my ideas, until long after too late for me. Though if I had known what I know now, I would have done it on my own, no matter how many years it took, without bothering with degree permission or grants.

The bittern, the great blue heron, and the night heron appaled^e most to the visitors, chiefly, I suppose, because folks are surprised

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to discover that such unique intriguing creatures are native citizens of their state, and often live right near humans without people being aware of them. Cooped up in pens, these odd birds became the harmless personification of what people imagine live out there in the bushes. People seem relieved to find that these denizens of the underworld of woods and swamp are just as weird to look at as they had hoped while at the same time they are helpless creatures rather than imagined monsters.

The bittern always posed for visitors, unconsciously, of course on his part. It was almost as if someone pushed a button every time a child or anyone walked in front of his cage; but it was Nature that made it mandatory for him to assume the cattail pose whenever danger seemed to threaten. People thought him deliberately snooty until I explained his stance, and that his brain wasn't big enough to tell him that he was standing right out in the open where even a stupid woodchuck could see he was a bird and not a cattail.

The wood ducks are the stream-lined sports models of the duck world. It has been stated that there isn't a color which doesn't appear somewhere on the male wood duck. But it is not as bright-witted as most ducks, probably because for eons it has depended upon its protective coloration, for such a medly of colors ^e tend to blend into a wild ba ckground. But humans aren't fooled, and those with guns can too easily walk up to a wood duck, whose only goal is to harvest it. This fact, plus the biological need for wood ducks to nest in tree holes above water, which places scarcely exist since the forests were harvested off the eastern wild lands. resulted in their numbers ~~awfully~~ ^{dwindling} alarmingly low by 1930.

A federal law had to be passed to save the wood duck from ex-

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tinction. Hunting of them was completely closed for several years. Game clubs took on the volunteer task of putting up wood duck nesting boxes along streams and in marshes. Game keepers in England tried their hand at raising them in pen enclosures and had such good luck that Americans took up the idea. At the time that I was at the Sanctuary there were a couple of wood duck farms in Connecticut, where I went on a visit. It was an exciting experience to see so many of these rare, very beautiful ducks all at once. But it hadn't been easy learning how to raise them. One of the Connecticut game keepers told me of the heart-breaking experience they had one day when a plane flew over, and the ducks, apparently taking its passing shadow for that of a hawk, panicked and flew pell mell into the chain link fence, many of them breaking their necks. Nature had built in this reflex for escaping hawks but didn't create any genes to tell them the difference between hawks and airplanes.

Soon, however, there were enough artificially reared wood ducks to release them by the hundreds into the wild, where, under protection against hunting a while longer, they became naturally established and reared their own young out in the wilds. Some people like to argue that passing laws is never a cure for a problem. But as long as too many people won't discipline themselves we must have laws to control them. The case of the wood duck, and since then of the whooping crane, and many mammals, are examples of what properly designed and enforced laws will do. The wood duck, which can now be hunted, is one of our most successful attempts at wildlife management. But that came about years after I used to stand there watching the gorgeous wood ducks in the Shade Swamp Sanctuary pens, wondering what chance they had.

There are dozens and dozens of species which are not equipped by nature to survive the hazards which humans throw at them, such

as the Ridley's sea turtle, the dusky seaside sparrow, the little snail darter fish, our bald eagle as well as eagles around the world, to say nothing of the still stressed whooping crane and the condor. Most of them are unable to adjust to the changes in their habitats caused by man, such as excessive tree cutting, bulldozing, and the draining of wetlands, to say nothing of the direct life-threatening plastic rings and bags which are now in lakes and streams and even escaping into the ocean, strangling some, indigestible for all.

Add guns, of course. There be them as has to shoot at anything that moves. In fact, there are humans, many more than you want to think, who would shoot the last known ^{ed} angle sitting high on a tree branch. There is also a certain breed of scientist, though I trust in the minority, who would collect a specimen of ANYTHING, without concern for its rareness. Personal prestige, recognition won through a scientific paper on a beleaguered species, are more important than giving a stressed wild female a chance to produce the next generation.

The Sanctuary wood ducks seemed so much more meek and quiet than the other waterfowl in the pens it would seem as if their very silence would help them survive. The only time I ever saw them abandon their genteel movements was the day the caretaker dumped a basketful of grass clippings into the pens. All of the birds in the place went into a frenzy of delight over those ordinary bits of grass, which no doubt made up for something missing in their daily diet though they were fed every day. It was a hullabaloo of a gormandizing orgy, the usually sedate wood ducks ~~■~~ just as wildly excited as everyone else.

It was a sight to sit on the path and watch them. Each duck

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discovered that the grass was greener and juicier in the next pen; at peril of decapitation in the wire mesh they poked their heads through to haul grass into their own pens which were almost as full as the pens next door. By the time their crops were stuffed the ducks were so overwrought with excitement they ⁱⁿ continued rushing around plunging their beaks into the mass of clippings and the muck below some of them. They couldn't seem to stop their frenzy although there wasn't space inside of themselves for another sprig of grass. Here was mob psychology in the raw. They reminded me of a small glass aquarium I once watched in a laboratory, which contained quantities of tiny little guppies. Someone dumped in a glass jarful, while I was standing there, of water in which swarmed myriads of minute daphne. Those tiny little guppie fish went wild with excitement. They chased and swallowed daphne until they were tipsy-sodden with surfeit; even when they lay unbalanced on their sides, like drunks, they still made passes at every daphne which darted by, though they couldn't hope to swallow another one. And so it was with the ducks and the grass clippings.

Caged animals, at least in those days, often lacked something in their diet or in their food predilections. They crave something, and when they get it or something related to it they go crazy with surfeit. In the wild, where they usually have a choice, they seem to just need sustenance and don't go into a frenzy when they happen upon something in abundance, unless, of course, some extreme of cold or some other vicissitude reduces them to almost starvation. But in addition, there is considerable evidence that animals in pens get bored and react almost electrically to some sudden excitement.

The Sanctuary was alive with wildlife of all kinds. Around

Cherrywood
 my tent and shack were oven birds and chewinks or towhees, both being woodland species. They were just inside the bushes at the top of the slope down the north end. They sang loudly at hours when other birds were apt to be silent. The oven birds, the ones which call "teacher, teacher, teacher" so plainly ~~and rhythmically~~ ^{and rhythmically} ~~and rhythmically~~, make nests on the ground which are covered over with an arch of grass in a shape best described in more recent times as a quonset hut.

While the oven bird is a small song bird, it is one of the largest of the warbler group. It is a little over half the size of a robin and looks somewhat like a small thrush because of its breast stripes, but it has an orange-cream crown patch, bordered by black. This bird is not easy to see, partly because of its general brown coloring which blends into an open woodland floor, but partly because of its secretive habits for it doesn't sit high on branches when it sings. You have to look for it down in the brown leaves. I claim it belongs to the group of birds which have ventriloquist ability, such as the wren. More than once I have been fooled by seeing a teacher bird in a different place than where I'd heard it calling when I had reason to believe that only one bird was present and calling.

Rain never stopped their cheerful calls, nor did it affect the chatter calls of the chewink which were relatively numerous in the underbrush around the plateau. The chewink, or towhee, would spend hours just calling back and forth to one another, sometimes two of them tossing "chewink" back and forth at one another for seven or eight minutes without pause. These birds are rather easy to locate because of their noisy habit of scratching leaves on the forest floor as they search for food. Also, they are almost the size of a robin, making them easy to see once you concentrate ~~on~~

Sherwood
on finding them.

One morning I stepped off the edge of the plateau trail to investigate a rustling in the bushes; a chewink suddenly darted out from under my feet. She put up the old broken-wing ruse so I knew a nest must be nearby. I carefully looked down as I stood stock still, and gasped, for there was a nest just at the side of one of my shoes, with eggs in it. So close had I come to smashing those eggs, into which had gone all the effort of the parent birds who had flown up to this chosen spot after spending the winter in Florida or Mexico!

I looked closer for there appeared to be an old piece of half-rotted dried apple in the nest. What strange chewink food was this? Bending down closely I could see it was a dead baby chewink, naked, dry, sprawled out, obviously trampled upon, partly covering one of the tan, spotted eggs. The mother bird perched on a nearby low tree limb, calling her heart out to distract my attention. I quickly flipped out the dead nestling, and moved along the path to end her worry.

An immensely long black snake frequented the edge of that trail, not far from the nest. Once he hissed at me as I passed and I called his bluff by stamping my feet at him. Snakes don't like trembling ground. They can't hear, but they can feel danger approaching by ground vibrations. He slithered off, but I didn't really try to chase him away as to me he was beautiful and I enjoyed his company.

One afternoon when I passed that way on my return from a trail-guiding trip, I was surprised to hear an ominous rattle in the old dry leaves under the bushes just in off the path. It sounded much as I would expect a rattlesnake to sound if I'd ever heard one, which I hadn't. But I knew rattlesnakes were not supposed to be present in that section of the state, so I stopped and looked carefully ~~for~~

Sherwood

for the source of the noise. Silence for a few moments. Then, there was that rattle again. Close enough for me to see what it was. There was my black snake, partially stretched out, with the tip of his tail on some dry leaves. Deliberately, he was vibrating that tail tip in the leaves, trying to scare me away. I had heard of this ruse but assumed it was one of those exaggerated outdoor snake stories. This time I had to face a fact.

The next day, as I came along this same path, the chewink was out in the path up ahead of me, playing broken wing. "Now what's bothering her?" I wondered, knowing that this time it wasn't me as I was too far away. A brief glimpse as I came abreast of her nest showed the black snake sliding close to the nest. I grabbed up a stick and this time really chased him, far down the wooded slope almost to the lower path. I knew he had to eat, too, but he'd better ~~choose~~ choose something with which I was not acquainted. It was days before I saw him again, but I kept an eye on that nest, for soon all of the eggs were hatched and the young were stretching scrawny necks with big, wide open mouths at the top. Soon they were up and around on their own. Eventually they flew off, the nest was empty, and the black snake came back, proving he had his own favorite territory. I was happy to see him there once more.

On the sandy plateau grew many low, wild blueberry bushes. The berries on one of them started to ripen early, in late June, so that by the 22nd I was able to pick a pint of them. Chewinks and catbirds ate the berries too, and one afternoon, when I was sitting at the base of a tree at the edge of the open area, writing a letter, I was distracted by a faint rustling near me. A turtle was picking blueberries with its sharp beak, and eating them! He munched them

Sherwood
with a satisfied expression which I never would have thought a turtle could get on its face.

Before that week was out the blueberries were mana from heaven. My sister, who had the only car in the family, had been coming out once a week with my groceries, for it was too long a walk in to the Farmington stores to carry heavy groceries back. Sometimes she drove to the Sanctuary on a bright summer evening, after her work at the Travlers, and stayed for supper. This time, she was due on a Thursday evening. But Thursday came and went, no sister, no groceries, and I hadn't made an effort to ration what I had on hand. But I wasn't too concerned; something had probably detained her, and she would be out Friday, or, at the worst, over the week-end.

But Friday came and went. Saturday arrived, still no groceries. Sunday the same. Even if by then I had decided to walk out for some emergency supplies the week-end was so busy with visitors I couldn't leave the trails, and of course the stores were closed Sundays. By Monday my food supply was almost at an end, and was very monotonous. The caretaker's wife had so completely blocked every move I had made toward friendship that I didn't dare ask to use her telephone.

I decided to bother someone for help only if I reached the point of physical weakness from real starvation. Monday I ~~had~~ had several appointments with scout groups. And, unexpectedly, two groups of boys arrived from Middletown. Some of them had lunches with them, and for once I understood a drooling dog. But I kept still.

When I returned to the shack later that day I pinned down to seeing just what food I had on hand. On the center shelf of one of the orange crates was a partial bag of potatoes, some cans of evap-

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orated milk, and a half of a box of shredded wheat. I'd been living all week-end on potatoes and blueberries. The diet of fried, baked, mashed or scalloped potatoes, morning, noon and night, would have palled if it weren't for the blueberries. In fact it was the blueberries, which made munching on dry shredded wheat possible. I kept reminding myself of how the Irish had survived on potatoes before the potato blight put an end to even that. I still had much tea.

More than once I thought of the unguarded ducks down at the swamp-edge pen. One of them I could have made last a long time, - fried, baked, or boiled in soup. But I would have to reach the crazed-starvation stage before I could bring myself to touch one of them. Inhibitions can be mighty powerful. I had a sharp axe. I had a gun. But these ducks were my personal friends and delightful companions. I'd have to be a cannibal to eat one of them.

I got out my woodcraft book and searched it for ideas on edible wild plants, and how to trap a rabbit. I wondered if I could kill a rabbit if I could ^{snare} one. I doubted I could harm those doe-like eyes and twitching bunny-rabbit nose.

The potatoes were giving out and it was Thursday again. Carefully I laid plans to get to the store tomorrow; maybe if I could get there early, as soon as the store opened, I could get back before any groups arrived. I stood by the stove, waiting for water to heat for tea, nibbling on dry shredded wheat, the best I could dream up for supper. Out of the corner of my eye I saw something moving at the far south end of the plateau, from the window, and thinking it might be a deer I moved over the window to look. There was my sister, coming up the path, with two armloads of bundles. I ran to help her.

"I thought you said a week from Thursday," she said, when I

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poured out my plight. From that experience, for the rest of my camping life, I have kept at least two weeks' worth of food on hand. My sister came out an extra day and drove me to ^a ~~the~~ store, so that I did a better job of stocking up, though she assured me she would never make that mistake again. Present day Indians, even those I came to know later in Maine, claim they wouldn't go off into the woods without ample food supplies. They learned, long before I did, that food just doesn't grow on trees or bushes and you can't live on berries. Modern day wild food enthusiasts do pretty well, but they learn when they try it that you can't work all day and scrounge ~~for~~ to live off the land as that is a full time job in itself. I have since learned that the reason primitive tribes remained primitive so long was because all their energy, time and talent ~~went~~ into scrounging for food. Not until they learned to raise crops and store the surplus did they have time for intellectual development.

The gun I had, which had been pressed upon me by the State Fish and Game people for personal protection, despite my insistence that I hated guns, was a .410 gauge sawed-off ~~xxxxxx~~ shotgun with a pistol handle. I have always felt the world would be a much better place to live in if guns had not been invented. But I was supposed to tote this gun more to protect me from civilized snakes than the wild variety, for it would be but a matter of time before word got around that a young lady was camping alone on the Sanctuary.

I started out carrying the durned thing around in a holster attached to my belt, for it was deemed wise by the powers-that-be that the public know I was properly ^{armed}. This, mind you, was in the days before the population explosion and when crime was rare. But the

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gun was so heavy, and when loaded made me so nervous, I finally took to hiding it in different places in the tent and shack.

One day I heard a terrific howling down in the swamp. A reporter from the HARTFORD TIMES was due any moment, and I had just put on a civilized-looking white dress, white socks and sandals, which I had brought along for special occasions. All pictures taken of me by reporters at the Sanctuary up to then had been when I'd had jodphurs on. I was determined this time to look more conventional. The commotion in the swamp sounded so ominous I grabbed the gun and ran down the north path to the pens below. Just a few feet before the pens, not far from the path edge, ~~was~~ out in the muck and the ooze of the swamp, was a huge collie dog stuck up to his leg pits and howling piteously.

I'd been cautioned not to step off the trail around the swamp because of quicksand spots, so I stood on the firm path edge and coaxed the poor dog, after I lay the gun down in the bushes. I feared he would start to sink out of sight any moment yet I hated to leave him long enough to run for help. Seeing a rescuer at hand, on high, dry land, the dog made a prodigious lunge. His forefeet were suddenly freed, and by another herculean effort he freed himself and fl^ondered up out of the sucking ooze. He stood on the path, looking at me, and I at him. I backed away, anticipating the pelt-shaking of a wet dog, but suddenly he jumped at me, ~~and~~ before I had time to be scared he lapped my face and hands and was all over me with joy. He was taller than I ~~was~~ up on his hind legs, and soon he was leaning against me. Need I say, I was quickly mud from head to foot. He obeyed when I pointed to him to go down the trail to the entrance. There was some indication he lived nearby.

I had just time to get my city clothes off and back into my usual outdoor duds before the reporter arrived. He regretted he had

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missed photographing the scene.

A twelve year old youngster, son of one of my college professors, came to camp with me for two weeks. Robbie as another Indian spirit so we had much in common despite the age gap.

Because the southern half of the plateau had been plowed to put in the game food shrubs, it was good turtle egg habitat, being a sandy terrace above a river, so Robbie and I went out there one day with small bucket and shovel, hoping to find some eggs to put into my wire cage. We had found several white, curled-up dried pieces of turtle eggs scattered about so now we hoped to find some whole, viable eggs.

To our surprise we had very good luck, for skunks had not found them all. We only wanted a few, to test their viability, by putting them where we would see what came out of them when they hatched. Which species would they turn out to be?

Just as we were calling a halt to our search, as we only wanted a limited number, Robbie called out "Indian pottery!" I flopped down beside him and studied the pieces of tan clay which he was brushing sand off of as he handed them to me. He lifted more pieces from the loose soil. Carefully, slowly, we dug and brushed the soil away. Seeing how crumbled were some of the pieces we took to just blowing the sand away, trying not to handle the pieces. Soon we saw that three bowls were set inside one another, the top edges of all three being beveled. We decided to take just a few pieces, and cover up the rest, hoping some historian would find them someday who would know how to get them out more whole than we could.

It was obviously Indian pottery. The pattern on the outside

Decorated
of all of the pieces was the same; it looked as if made tediously with the blunt tip of some small tool. The dots, lines or general indentations were so numerous I didn't see how the most patient Indian, with all the time in the world, could have bothered to do such decorating. Later, however, we learned that they had pressed ~~coarsely-~~ woven cloth against the moist clay before baking the pots, which accounted for the repetitiousness of the pattern.

The pieces which we had, that had held together without crumbling, we put into an envelope. A few we put on display at the exhibit shelter by the duck pens, each of us kept a couple of pieces for ourselves, then later we gave the best pieces to the Children's Museum in Hartford in Robbie's name.

The pottery find started us on a search for arrowheads in our free moments, and success was so good that in a few days we had an imposing collection of points, some of which were half formed, some broken, but a few were almost perfect. Nothing about the Sanctuary pleased me more than the absolute proof that I was camping on an old Indian campsite.

We had a crowd of visitor's Robbie's first Sunday afternoon; he thoroughly enjoyed helping entertain the children at the duck pond and also out by the animal cages, for he knew much more about wildlings than city children; he was not only able to answer many of their questions, but was even able to tell them animal stories. And of course he could talk down ~~at~~ their level.

Toward the end of that afternoon the crowd dwindled to one family group left at the duck pens, and three middle-aged, heavy-set men. The latter didn't ^{act} as if they had any real sanctuary interest. They huddled together in consultation at the far end of the duck

pens, with a mien which suggested trouble.

Robbie sneaked up close to me where I was standing by the exhibit shelter and whispered, "I don't like the looks of those men." I said, "I don't either." They were dressed neatly enough, but they hadn't looked at the ducks once since they arrived. When the family group left we knew we'd be alone with them. It seemed strange to see people whispering to one another out there in the woods, under the open sky. And now and then one turned to look at me.

One of the men started toward me, calling out in a coarse tone, "We have some questions to ask you."

I excused myself from the family group, which I had by then started talking to. I walked over to the men, reluctantly. They asked such inane questions that it was obvious they were making things up. They were not the slightest bit interested in my answers, as I deliberately twisted everything around to include natural history. One of them pointed toward the path that went up the north end of plateau and asked where that trail went to.

"Nowhere. There's just a field up there," I said.

"Must be more than a field," muttered one. "Why would there be such a good path up there?"

"It's for young folks," I hedged, "who want a longer hike."

They looked at one another. "C'mon," urged one, the smallest though the heaviest set.

"Aw, who wants to climb all over creation?" asked the tallest pot-bellied one, grumbling and muttering things I couldn't hear.

"Come along and teach us about the birds and the trees," coaxed the third. By then the family had moved toward the entrance path

and were disappearing down the trail to the entrance.

"I can't", I lied. "I'm supposed to stay on this trail down here. Robbie had come close to us where he could hear us.

After further underbreath mutterings among themselves they headed ~~north~~ toward the north trail and started up toward the plateau. As soon as they were out of sight Robbie said in a strong whisper, "I'll run up the other end and secretly watch them. They won't see me."

"O.K.", I agreed. "But make sure they DON'T see you. Stay far enough away so it will be easy for you to outrun them. If they try going into the office shack or the tent run right back and tell me. We can run for the caretaker."

Then I remembered the gun! My hair stood on end. It was in a suitcase in the shack. "Robbie!" I called, as I ran part way up the south end trail after him. He heard me and came back a few steps. "For heavens's sakes, don't let them see you. The gun is in the shack!"

Robert was such an expert at blending himself into the woods Indian fashion, and these men were such obvious city slickers who probably couldn't see him if he moved conspicuously in the bushes, that I let him ~~Robbie~~ go on up.

After a few anxious moments there by the bottom of that south path Robbie came tearing down the path to me. "They looked in the shack windows, and I could hear them arguing, but they didn't go in. They are headed this way."

"They must have seen the tent," ^I said.

"Maybe," Robbie answered, "but I couldn't tell. They didn't go near it." Let's go tell the game keeper."

I knew the tent wasn't very conspicuous. One reason such tents were a khaki color was to help them blend into their surroundings, as I've already indicated. These guys had city eyes, "forest blind."

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We ran all the way to the Sanctuary entrance and reported it to the gamekeeper, who was fortunately the one out there feeding the animals. The three of us hung around the owl cages until the men appeared. They moved along toward the exit, only occasionally glancing at us. But the gamekeeper made it obvious he was watching them. He moved a few steps toward them and called out, "No one is allowed in here after ~~six~~ ^{five} o'clock, you know. It's almost that late now. Hope you enjoyed your visit. Goodbye."

"I'll put up the chain across the entrance," he said, "and I'll watch a little closer tonight." He returned to his feeding chores.

Robbie, in the extra cot in the ~~tent~~, and I, lying there listening to the night sounds in the woods, and the ducks gabbling down below, were a little apprehensive that night. I wasn't too worried. I had learned that most people looking for trouble are actually afraid of the woods at night; and the few who aren't seldom can find their way around in the dark, even with a flashlight. No one could come into our area with a light and not be seen. There was no moon so it was quite dark out there. Both of us were experts at moving around in woodland shadows so we knew it would ^{be} difficult if not impossible to find us if a light warned us of anyone approaching. Of course that hinged upon us not getting caught asleep, trapped in the tent before we could run. But nothing happened all night.

In the middle of the week we went off to the YWCA camp, at Somers, I to be a guest speaker on wildflower conservation. Robbie said he was going to teach the girls how to fish. He did, too. He rowed some of them around the lake and caught an exceptionnaly large pickerel, which had the girls squealing. They took it to the camp cook. He returned with me at day's end to our camp with his pockets

bulging with lollypos^p and chocolate bars from his admirers.

We arrived back at camp shortly before midnight, a local YWCA woman having been our transportation. We were so tired we hurried up the south slope path and along the plateau path in silence, our flashlights turned off as we both enjoyed letting our feet feel the way, with tree tops along the skyline providing further direction.

"Race," you Robbie~~s~~ suddenly said, just when I thought he must be half asleep on his feet. When we got half way along the plateau to our tent site we stopped dead. A light was moving about near the shack. It was a strange light; it didn't seem to cast wide beams as flashlights do; it was just a small round spot of light on the ground, moving slowly, from side to side, as if searching for something on the ground.

We ducked down into the game food shrubs, and creeping along on hands and knees ~~forward~~ toward the shack-end of the Plateau. We stopped at the last row of shrubs; we lay down on our stomachs under the plant cover, and watched.

"I can crawl up there and see what they are doing," whispered Robbie.

"Oh no!", I whispered emphatically. "You'd be right out in the open. Nothing to hide behind. The gun is in the tent. Under the head end of my mattress. It isn't safe, Robbie. They could have found it by now."

"Well, we ought to do something," he countered.

"Maybe we should go back and get the gamekeeper," I suggested.

"It's awful late," answered Robert. "He's asleep, and his wife would have a fit."

"Yeah, I guess you are right," I whispered, keeping my eyes

on the strange, still slowly moving light, wishing that old lady anywhere but in her comfortable bed at that moment.

Then the light seemed to disappear. It vanished. Was it just turned off, and its owner still there? For several minutes there was no sign of it.

"Maybe they've gone," I whispered.

"They could only have gone down the north trail, since they haven't come this way," said Robbie. Our eyes by then were so adjusted to the dark and very faint starlight that although we couldn't see anything moving as far away as the tent, if anyone had moved our way we would have seen their bulky shadows.

"If we tried going back for help, now," Robbie said, "we'd bump into them, down on the main trail.

"We're safer here," I whispered, even if we have to stay here until daybreak."

After becoming a little chilled in the damp dew and evening airs for a half hour or more, and there being no further sign of the light, we decided to slither up to the shack, then duck through the bushes back of the shack and around to the tent.

"The gun isn't loaded, is it?" whispered Robbie, when we paused once, flat on our stomachs.

"Gosh, I don't remember," I said really worried now. "Let's watch quietly from here for another ten or fifteen minutes before we dare get any closer. If nothing happens by then we'll sneak up to the tent together and light up the insides with our flashlights. "No warwhoops," Robbie, I cautioned him. "If we see something move, run for the woods. If we get separated, try to climb a tree and stay there for the night."

Even Robert was willing to be cautious the last few feet,

remembering the ~~XXXX~~ gun. It was now a long time since we had seen the light, and knowing we had arrived home late I felt it should soon be civil twilight, that first faint glow before daybreak.

Gradually, after estimating that our approximate fifteen minutes were up, we crawled on hands and knees to the shrubs back of the shack, then moved cautiously around to the tent. We lay on the ground back of the tent, listening, then gradually we stood up, alert ~~to~~ to run for the north woods at slightest cause. But there wasn't a sound. We moved cautiously around to the front door, which faced the woods. I aimed my flashlight into the tent and flashed it on for a brief second. In that one instant it was obvious no one was there. To make sure, Robbie stepped inside, with his light turned on, and looked under the cost, while I stood guard outside. Then he checked for the gun. It was where I'd put it. Our fears eased instant'y.

The whole world seemed suddenly, miraculously, safe. I was mighty thankful this night to be in back of that gun instead of in front of it, though once more I was flooded with the wish that I didn't have a gun at all. But we continued to be cautious.

Quietly, slowly, we moved over to the shack, this time with the gun in my hand, its safety cock off, though I still wasn't sure if it was loaded, or if I'd have the nerve to fire it at any human. We weren't surprised to find that the shack door had been forced in and its doorjamb splintered. I flashed my light quickly into shack's one room as I'd done at the tent. No one was there. But what a mess! We hurried in, though Robbie kept looking out the door in case someone was out there. This time I turned on the flashlight and kept it on. The contents of my two suitcases were dumped all over the floor. Books and papers were strewn all around, as if a

giant spoon had been used to stir it up. I shuddered to think how often I had hidden the gun in one of those suitcases. I've never since hidden anything valuable in a suitcase.

We got to bed at last and took turns keeping watch during the night. I don't know how Robbie woke up for his turn but he did. Morning came quickly, however, and we were up before the sun.

Robert was out and around first, scouting for evidence. He found large footprints, much bigger than ours, in front of the tent. We weren't sure of the footprints by the shack, as those three men had so recently be there. Inside, however, the shack was a mess. But as far as I could tell nothing was missing. Were they looking for money, or jewelry? Nothing in the tent had been disturbed.

When I knew it was time for the gamekeeper to be out cleaning the animal pens, we went together to the Sanctuary entrance to report the vandalism. He was watering the ruffed grouse when we arrived, his wife was cleaning their feed racks. He had known about our being away the day before as I'd told him we were going, so when he saw us he said, "I heard you arrive back last night."

"Yes, We were late as they had special programs at the "Y" camp." Then I told him what had happened, making it as brief as possible in the presence of Big Hat. She quickly looked up at me, the first time she looked at me since I arrived, and with the meanest look on her face she snapped, "Don't come crying to us for help. It's your own fault. I know the kind of life you have been living up there. Women don't go livin' in the woods for no good purpose."

"You shut up!" her husband ordered her. He turned to us and said gently, "I'll phone the Hartford office and report it. They'll advise me what to do. I didn't see or hear anyone before your car drove in, or after it left.

A family argument started, so we walked away.

I was so flabbergasted and embarrassed I was unable to speak for a few minutes. Being quite naïve for my age the woman's words were quite a shock to me. I looked at Robert, wondering what he was thinking. When you are of a disposition to be preoccupied with chasing birds and snakes, patting trees, ^{or} watching clouds boil and unboil, smelling earthy fragrances, listening to wild messages in the forest breezes, and spending indoor time with natural history books rather than with crime stories and movies, there are certain facts of human life which pass you by. Today, of course, you can't escape it.

That morning, at the animal pens, was but an introduction to a world which thinks differently than I. Yet, also, over time, I came to realize that life is sweeter, more pristine, infinitely more desirable, for the innocent. Would that I could return to such unawareness; it would suit my spirit far better. Today, however, it wouldn't be wise to be so artlessly unsophisticated.

We decided to skip back down the wide path of the duck pens, Robbie and I, and laugh at the wind in the leaves. But after we had climbed back up to the shack area we found real cause for shame on us. The little turtles had hatched out while we were away the day before. The sun had been too hot; there hadn't been a sheltering cloud all that day. I had deliberately left the cage, with the buried eggs, in a sunny spot for incubation, as turtles themselves do. But I had no idea when they would hatch. When not restrained by a cage, baby turtles can move to a more shady spot, even if only to under a leaf.

The poor little fellows, trapped in the small wire enclosure, on top of the hot sand, had cooked in the extreme microclimate. I

Shawna
thought I had learned a lesson with the cecropia moth at forestry camp. But though the circumstances were different the end results were the same. The only mitigation in this memory over the years has been that they were snapping turtles, and no turtle area needs too many of those.

Robbie and I were moved to the hatchery house for awhile, by the Hartford office, where we could lock the doors at night, as the residents were away on a month's vacation. But now the sky and the night fragrances and sounds were shut out from us. The confinement was compensated for, however, by our being closer to the fish hatchery. We enjoyed watching the feeding and general rearing processes of brook, brown and rainbow trout, and Robbie was allowed to help feed them. He was also permitted to swim in the big round holding pond which was almost empty of fish at the time. In true boy fashion he soon had the house dripping with sand. Robbie has sold me ever since on the wisdom of taking a small boy along on a camping trip for enhancement of your own observations and adventures. He went home before I left the hatchery house.

Shortly before I left the Sanctuary a new gamekeeper and his wife moved in, the others having been transferred to a new game bird hatchery project where there were no trails for the public. The new folks were wonderful to me; they were great company, filling the gap after Robbie left. These people restored in me faith in the peace and beauty of the Sanctuary so that I felt safe enough to return to my tent on the plateau. They were much ~~better~~ more effective "guardians of the gates."

When it came time for me to fold up my tent and move away I was sad, not only to leave my duck and heron pals, the deer and

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the owls and the raccoons at the entrance zoo, but also their new keepers. Perhaps the hardest of all was to leave the Indian spirits who shared the sun and wind and rain and the stars with me on the plateau. I am sure I would have invented a reason to stay a little longer, as I was invited to do so, if it weren't that I was signed up for some new, advanced wildlife-ecology courses at the university that fall. Also, a juniper patch over there was waiting for me where I knew lived deer, a family of red foxes, rabbits and chickadees.