

Reproduced by kind permission of Evensford Productions Limited and Pollinger Limited. Copyright c Evensford Productions Limited, 1970.

Living 'Nov 1970

From My Garden by H.E. Bates

From his lovely home in Kent, the well-known novelist writes about some of the visitors that come and go in his garden

Of Birds (both kinds)

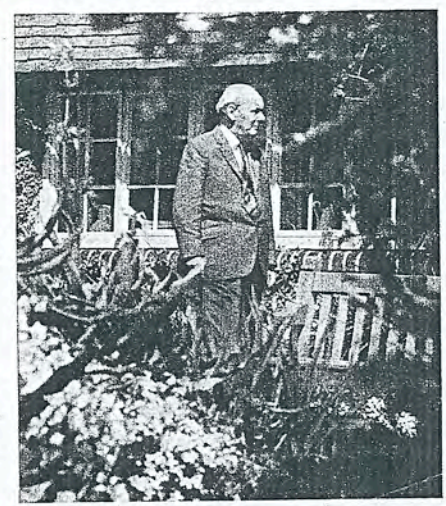
The behaviour of birds (both kinds) may be likened, I sometimes think, to the peace of God: it passeth all understanding. For centuries men have been making the mistake of trying to understand women, not appreciating that women neither need nor want to be understood; merely to be loved. In much the same way we gardeners are now trying to understand birds, their apparently fickle nature and what makes them mischievously ravage so many of the plants we love.

I am prompted to these observations by an article by the gardening expert Mr Roy Hay, who had received and dealt with an extensive pile of correspondence on the subject of why birds attack certain flowers, not only without apparent reason but also apparently out of heartless ingratitude for the food that gardeners put out for them in winter. The greater number of Mr Hay's correspondents were firm in the conclusion that the more food you put out for birds the more they will attack your plants, and with this view, very reluctantly, Mr Hay agreed.

For my part I do not agree. It is my firm conviction, based on something like 40 years of gardening, that the behaviour of birds in gardens is wholly illogical—that is from the human point of view.

There can be few gardeners who have not suffered painful and infuriating experiences. I give now a few of my own. For years my forsythia, ignored by birds, was a ravishing sight. Suddenly the birds decided this wouldn't do at all and they began to ravage it unmercifully, so that for ten years not a single bud was allowed to blossom. Now, with equal and inexplicable suddenness, they ignore it again, so that once more it blossoms splendidly. And so with polyanthus: unmolested for years, they were suddenly mercilessly attacked. The cure, wholly successful for several seasons, was black cotton. Then, last year, even that failed to deter. In desperation I resorted to ginger. It worked.

I had for many years a bush of that bewitching of viburnums, the richly scented *V. Carlesii*, and another *V. Burkwoodii*. Suddenly, and for a period of five years, every bud on



the bushes dropped before opening. The cause, I was informed by a horticulturalist far more experienced than I, was unknown. Moreover the disease, as disease it evidently was, was spreading everywhere, even to the Royal Horticultural Society gardens at Wisley. Then one day I appealed to another expert. His answer was simple: birds. Again it was black cotton to the rescue.

Last year a pair of misselthrushes decided that the silver foliage of *Centaurea gymnocarpa* would make a delightful nesting material. They went into the attack on a May morning. I replied with a pair of barn cloches, thinking that the flash of glass in the sun would be an adequate scare. Not so; I had neglected to close the cloche ends and the thrushes seemed to find it even greater fun to hop into the little glass houses and fetch out the silver 'wallpaper' for their new home. The cloche ends having been put on, the birds, infinitely puzzled, came back almost to sneer through the glass. Sometimes forget-me-nots make tempting nesting material, though I confess that it is not an unpretty sight to see a goldfinch flicking delicately through the air with a bright blue sprig of flower in its beak.

Constantly we ask ourselves why do they do it? I also constantly ask myself another question: why, suddenly, and for no apparent reason, do birds of one kind or another desert a garden? I read somewhere, the other day, the chaffinch is one of Britain's com-

monest birds. So it used to be in my garden, some pairs being so tame that they would come and eat cake out of your hand on a summer afternoon. Now, with us, the chaffinch has become a rare bird.

Yet who am I to complain? In the wretched, protracted winter of 1969/70 I suppose we put out more food for birds than ever before. Result? Contrary to the theories of Mr Hay and his correspondents the birds have responded by behaving impeccably. Not a bud of forsythia, wisteria or viburnum has been touched.

It doesn't make sense? Of course it doesn't make sense. Birds, of whatever sort, aren't supposed to make sense. For that reason we say that we don't understand them; but my own theory is that we should simply say to them (both kinds of course) 'for all thy faults we love thee still'.

Evensford Productions Ltd, 1970

Fabulous Crimplene Fabrics 

DIRECT TO YOU

in the newest glorious shades and designs

Plain or patterned and in 60" width! Here's a new pleasure to Home dress-making—here's your chance to wear Original styles—truly bespoke and ending all size problems. Your young family too can look really super at a fraction of the normal cost and be clothed in quality Crimplene. Remember—it's machine washable and needs no ironing. It's crease and shrinkproof—and colour fast. Prices—From 27/11 per yard.

Send today for illustrated Styles and Fabric Samples.

CRIMPLENE is a Regd. Trademark of ICI.

To Ace Home Fashions (Dept. GN)
63A Belsize Lane, Hampstead, London, N.W.3.
Please send me by return Free Styles & Fabric Samples brochure.

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____