

CHILDREN'S PAGE

FRIENDSHIP WITH BIRDS

By
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THE possibility of cultivating the friendship of our own native birds is proved by the stories of some bird-lovers who, with infinite patience and sympathetic understanding, have succeeded in gaining the confidence of their little feathered friends.

Usually the secret is in providing suitable food regularly throughout the winter months when the birds are hungry, but occasionally an injured bird or an orphaned baby bird has given the opportunity to show what kindness and care can do in the way of winning the trust of the little stranger.

There is always the temptation to take advantage of a little bird's helplessness and to keep it as a pet, in captivity, but this usually results in the bird's pining for its liberty and dying, in spite of the good intentions of its captors. The ideal method of giving an injured native bird perfect freedom brings its own reward as is shown in the following story from Southland.

Four years ago last March bush-fellers at work in the bush at Tokanui heard the cries of a native pigeon as she circled round a fallen tree. One of them, Mr. Lionel McEwan, hunting around for the cause of the alarm, found a young grey pigeon that had dropped out of its nest. It was impossible to restore it either to the nest or to the mother bird, and, noticing that it was injured, he rolled it up in his jersey and took it home to his wife. The little bird was carefully tended and later was given to Mr. McEwan's mother.

"He was just starting to grow his feathers when we got him," writes Mrs. R. McEwan. So the baby bird's kind friends had the pleasure of watching its down give place to the beautiful gay plumage of the New Zealand native pigeon.

The hungry bird refused nothing in the way of food: "Bread, tea and sugar, cake, butter, wheat or anything" offered was acceptable to him and for two years he was content to live in his adopted home. Then for the first time he ventured out into the world in search of his own kind.

Some months later there was a flutter at the back door and the pet pigeon flew in, sure of a warm welcome. "Yes, we can handle him," says Mrs. McEwan, and," she added, "he coos just like any other wild pigeon."

Periodically, at the call of the wild, the pigeon flies off to the forest—once he remained away for nine months—but always he returns to the home that sheltered him in babyhood. As if to prove to the forest birds the truth of the tale that he had told them, he sometimes brings with him other native pigeons, from three to seven in number, which come close to the house but do not venture inside as the pet pigeon does. "He taps on the door when wanting entry and flies right in on to the table and he comes once or twice a day for his meals."

To have been the means of saving the life of this young pigeon and rearing it successfully would be reward enough to any bird-lover, even should the bird choose to remain in his forest home, but to see him returning again and again of his own free will and claiming them as his friends must bring a thrill of pleasure to Mrs. McEwan and her family.

For those who take the trouble to befriend the birds, there is many a glad surprise as well as much entertainment and enjoyment.

W. H. GUTHRIE-SMITH WITH HIS
TAME PIGEON.

