

YOUR GARDEN AND MINE

By Ann Earncliff Brown (No. 35)

"Give And Take" In the Garden

THOSE of you who listen in to the Microphone Round Table Talks will have heard how important a part native birds play in the up-keep and re-establishing of our native

bush. Most people welcome for their own sakes the friendly little bush birds, but do we always see to it that we treat our bird visitors as hospitably as we do our human friends? Here in the south, especially, where winters are hard, we can do much to eke out the food available in our gardens—the berries, seeds,

and insect life that daily become less abundant.

If you have no longer in bloom nectar-bearing flowers, you may still attract honey-seekers to your garden by setting out suitable vessels of honey and water and even sugar and water. A good way to do this is to procure aspirin bottles; slip round the neck a wide frill or platform of dried orange peel for birds to alight on. If desired this peel may be cut into petalled flower shape. Round the screw-threaded neck of the bottle bind a piece of wire, and by this securely

suspend the bottle about 9 to 12 inches from branches of trees or shrubs. Weight the bottles with some small clean pebbles, then keep them well filled with the syrup. Judge for yourself if this is a popular cocktail! Bird tables, either simple make-shifts or elaborately ornamental affairs, perhaps combined with a bird bath, should be kept supplied with bread crumbs, tiny pieces of suet and scraps of apple—in fact, mixed household scraps as long as these are not in a messy condition, are all acceptable to birds during winter. Life for them at all times is full of hazards, and winter brings in addition hunger and cold. Your kindness will not go unrewarded. Apart from the good work done in blights, injurious grubs, etc., and from the pleasure the presence of birds bring, these birds carry to your garden a surprising number of seedlings. In a garden I have visited, where honey and food, including all kinds of berries, are constantly set out, I have seen a regeneration process such as our friends of the Round Table tell of. Circling the tree from which honey vessels are suspended is a wide well cultivated seed bed—once empty. To-day, still unplanted by man, this bed is full of seedlings of natives of a surprisingly wide variety. So many are there, becoming established and apparently quite happy, that it is now necessary to thin them out. A fuchsia thus come by is now quite a good sized bush.

I have been interested lately to see a pair of chaffinches who are battering on the seeds of the sunflowers I was busy clearing up when influenza and bad weather upset my activities. Now while any of the seeds remain, I will leave the tall untidy stems and heavy bowed heads—a table set truly in the midst of enemies, for while the finches assume all kinds of quaint attitudes in their efforts to pry out the seeds, our large watchful tom cat crouches below. Since I in turn keep stern watch on him I allow him this thrill of anticipation.

The laburnums have, till now, kept their seed purse strings tight drawn. Though I have at times regretted the untidy appearance of laburnums in winter I realise how welcome the hard seeds must be now when more attractive seeds are gone—a sort of "iron ration" which sparrows as well as fantails now daily draw upon.

These lines of W. H. Davies may perhaps be allowed to end this appeal:

*My sacrament of wine and broken bread
Is now prepared, and ready to be done;
The Tit shall hold a crust with both his feet,
While crumb by crumb, he picks it like a bone.
The Thrush, ashamed of his thin ribs, has blown
His feathers out to make himself look fat;
The Robin, with his back humped twice as high
For pity's sake has crossed my threshold's mat.
The Sparrow's here, the Thrush and Jenny Wren—
The wine is poured, the crumbs are white and small;
And when each little mouth has broken bread
Shall I not drink and bless them one and all?*

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